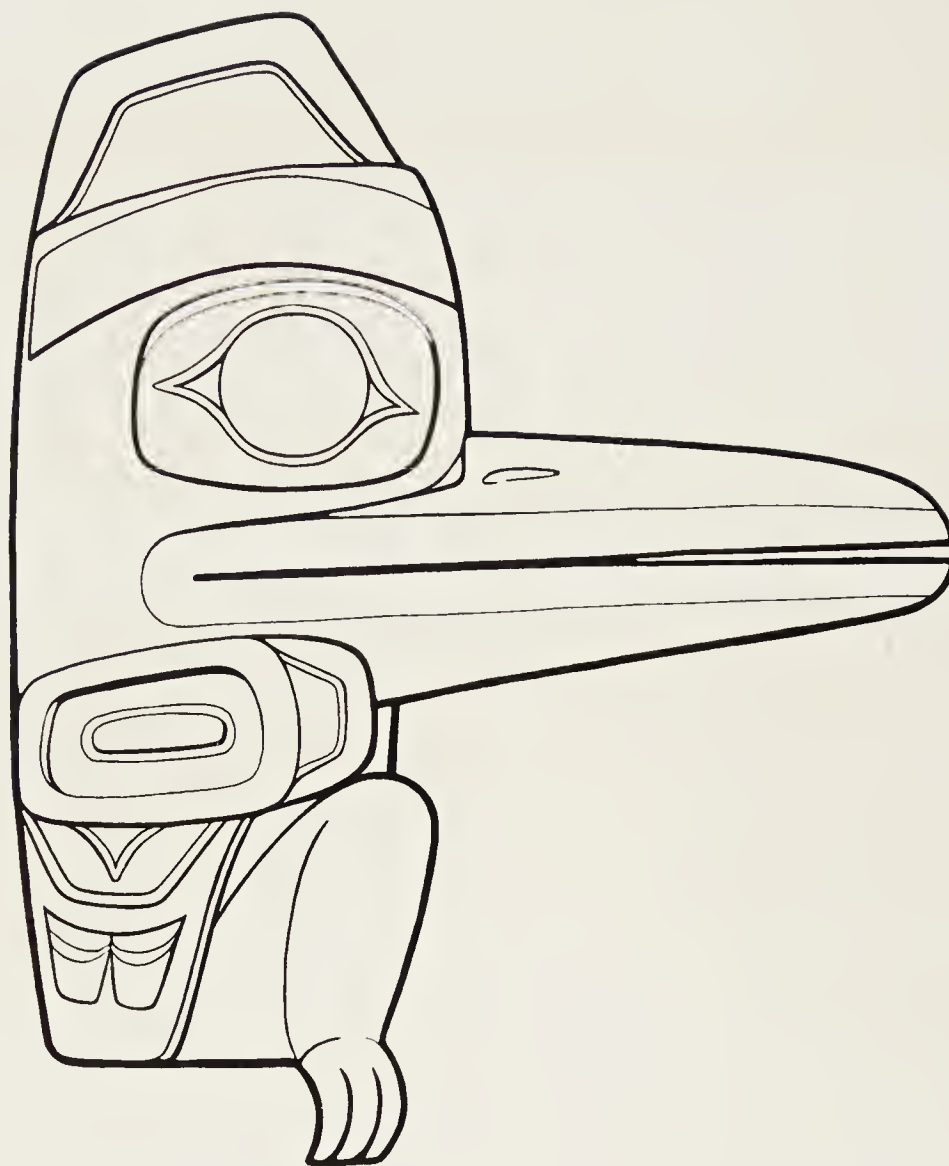


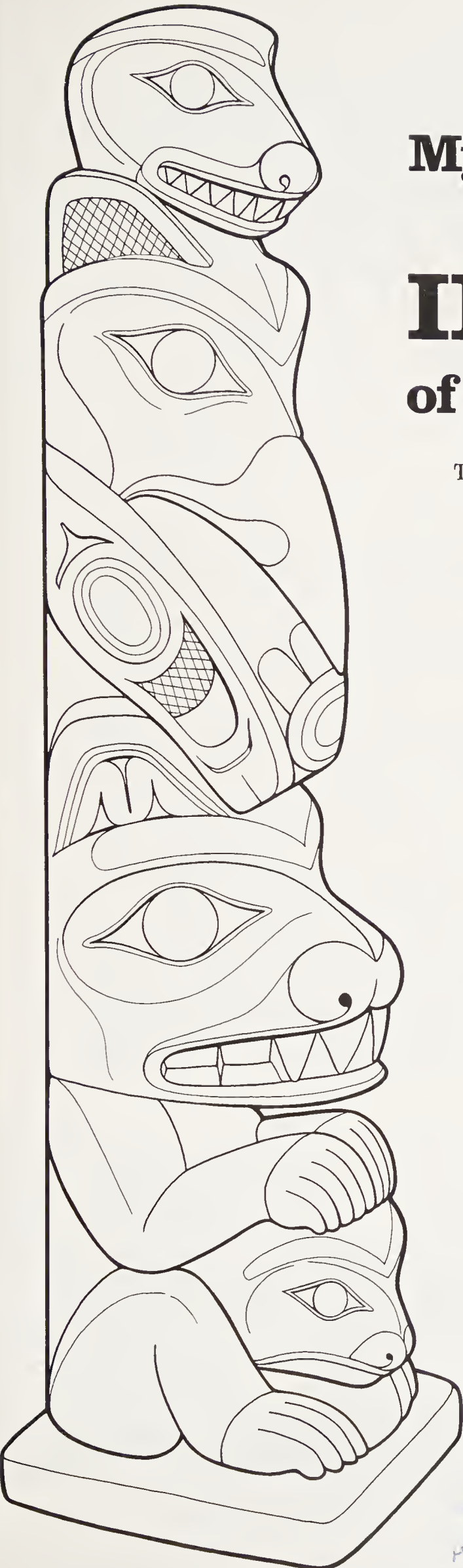
Pamphlet
NS-002

Myths & Legends of the Haida **INDIANS** of the Northwest





The Raven from the totem
pole in front of House five,
Skidegate (shown on cover).



Myths & Legends of the Haida **INDIANS** of the Northwest

THE CHILDREN OF THE RAVEN

by

Martine J. Reid, Ph.D.

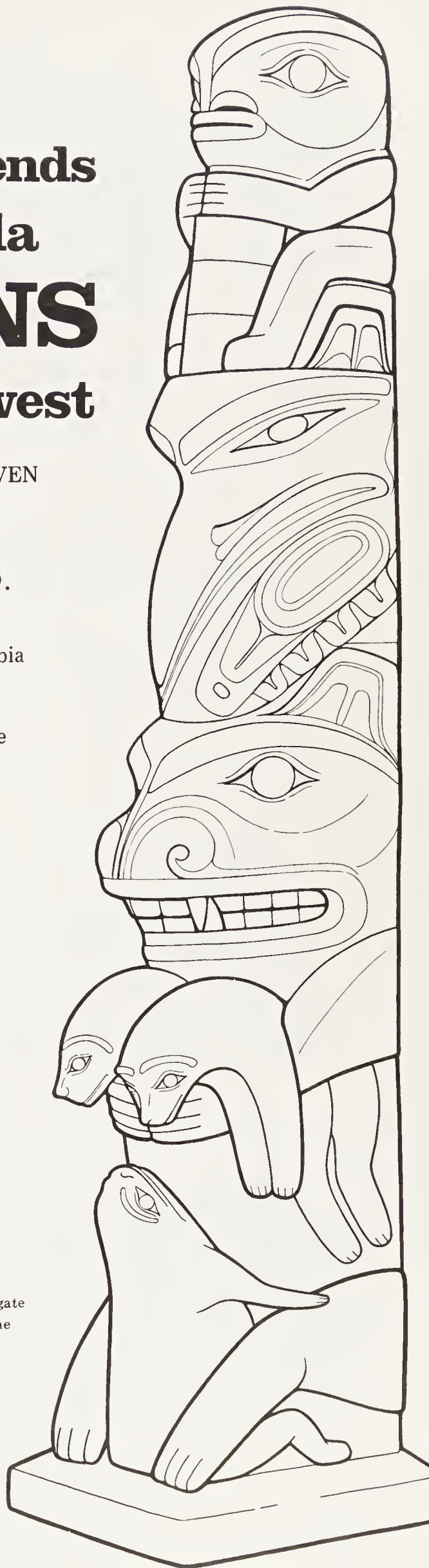
Research Affiliate
University of British Columbia

Drawings by Nancy Conkle



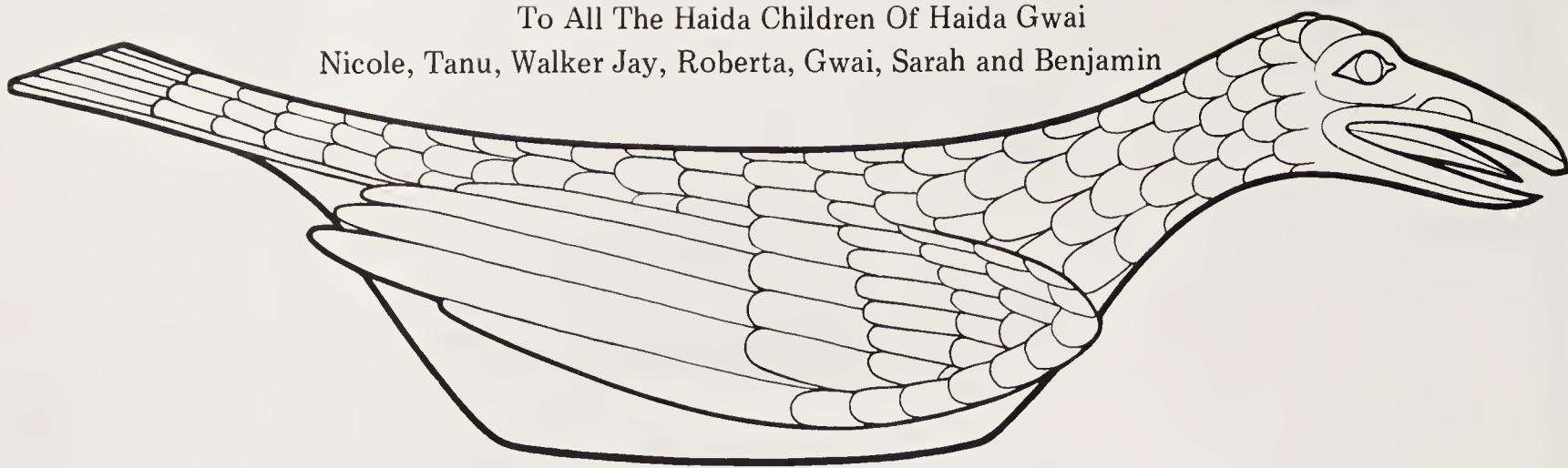
Raven, on the house pole from Skidegate on the back cover, is in the Provincial Museum, Victoria, British Columbia

Raven & Bear Mother from Skidegate argillite poles; right, Museum of the American Indian; left, pvt. col.



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To All The Haida Children Of Haida Gwaii
Nicole, Tanu, Walker Jay, Roberta, Gwai, Sarah and Benjamin



INTRODUCTION

The Haida people live in *Haida Gwaii*, the Queen Charlotte Islands in British Columbia and in the Prince of Wales Islands, in Alaska.

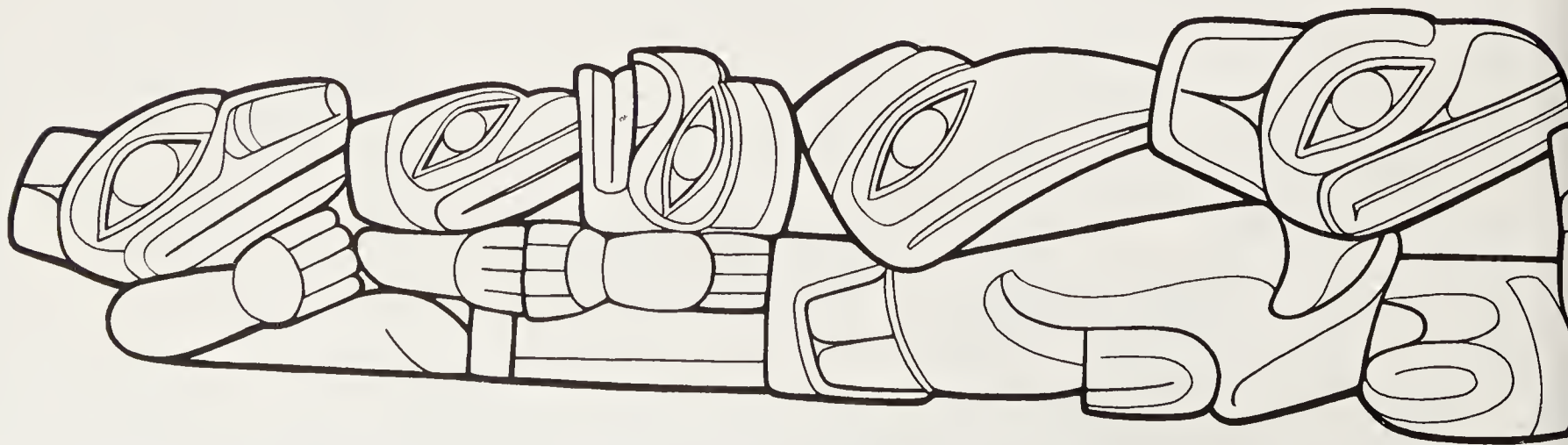
Haida mythology is based first on universal themes. People from all over the world have attempted to explain the unknowable by constructing a supernatural world. And they talk about this world in their myths and legends. But each of these traditional tales has its own characteristics and embellishments, depending where it comes from.

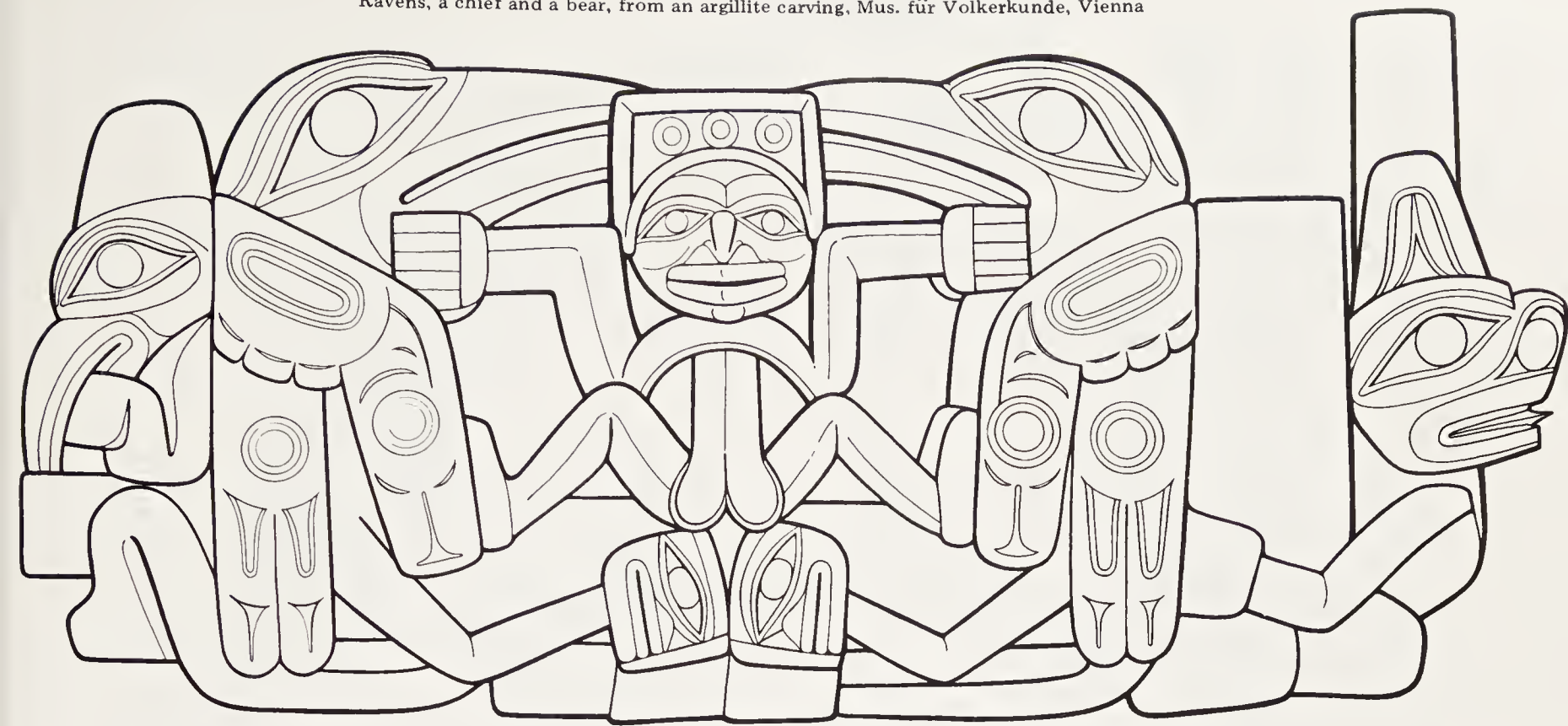
Haida myths can be classified into several categories, the most important of which is the Raven cycle. The Raven's primary role as a culture hero is not so much to create things as to change them, or to make them happen. He is more a transformer, a trickster, than a creator. He carries with him all the wit, humor, dignity and despair of all mankind. He makes people laugh at them-

selves and cry at the same time, showing how their greatness is overlaid by vanity. He is energy unfolding as he flies or transforms himself at his will to better suit his plot, playing tricks on the unknown ruler of the universe, who may be himself. Being caught at his own game sometimes makes him look pathetic and miserable. How can bad things happen to demi-gods?

As a transformer he is responsible for the present order of the universe. He discovers mankind, acquires and controls food, brings the light into the world. Episodes from the Raven myths were and still are represented on carved totem poles throughout the Islands, and on some other two-dimensional designs.

Although the Raven cycle is the dominant theme among Haida myths, there is a second category of legends which are also represented in their pictures. Among them,





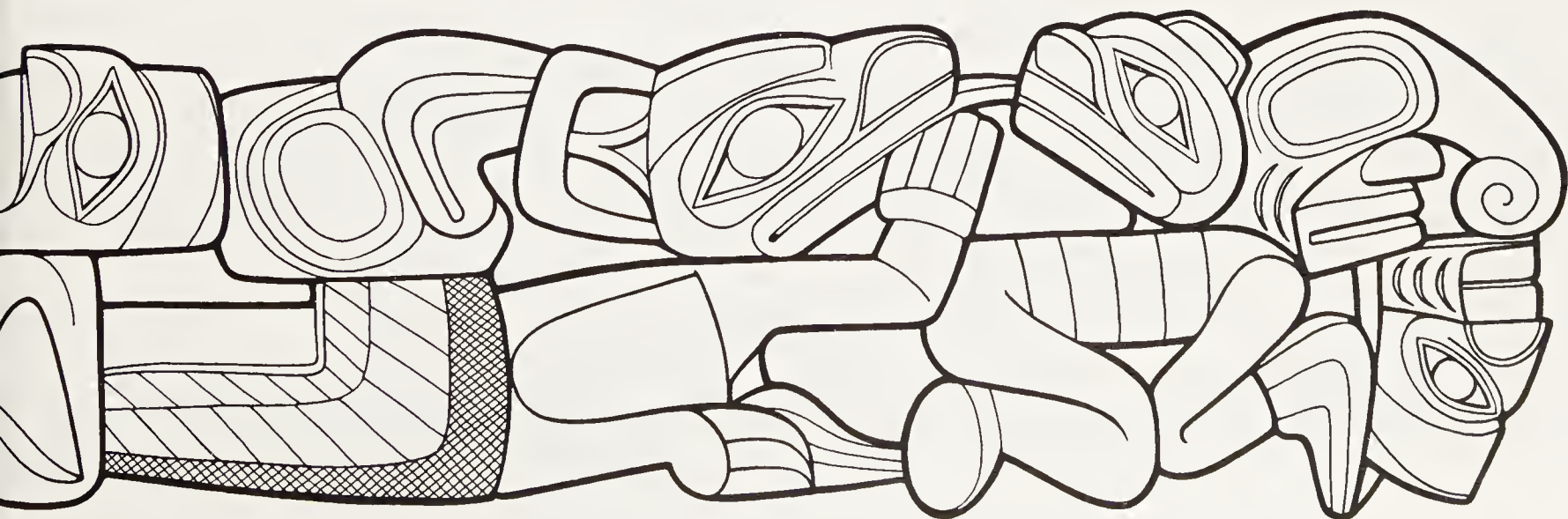
the Bear Mother and Father and Nanasingat are the best examples. These stories telling the adventures of supernatural beings, enhanced by magical power, deal mostly with marriage alliances and access to wealth. But journeys into the underworld or into the celestial realm tell us also about the cosmological world of the Haida.

Richness of both the mythology and the accompanying artistic representation of these themes in Haida art have been universally acclaimed now and it is with the hope that, someday, these stories will reach some Haida children, that I undertook to edit a selection of Haida myths from Marius Barbeau. These myths are still celebrated

today with the same vigor as in the past. The Raven is far from being silent. Things continue to change. As long as the Haida people were in control of these changes, their destiny was in good hands. Haida people today are drifting in a current in which they have no control, or very little.

THE RAVEN AND THE FIRST PEOPLE

The great flood which we read about in the Bible also covered the land of the Haida, *Haida Gwaii*, which we now call the Queen Charlotte Islands. For many months only the very peak of the highest mountain could be seen above the stormy seas, and on top of it the Raven perched, wet, hungry and bored.





Then one day the water began to fall, and at last even the thin strip of sand now known as Rose Spit lay dry. The Raven flew there and found it covered by clams, cockles, rock oysters, crabs, scallops, sea cucumbers, abalone, red turbans, sea urchins, mussels in their dark blue mantle, and fish of all kinds left behind by the falling water. For a long time, he did nothing but eat, gorging himself on these delicacies. But at last even his gluttony was satisfied and he began to think of the other things he liked doing, playing tricks, changing things so the world would not settle down to a boring routine.

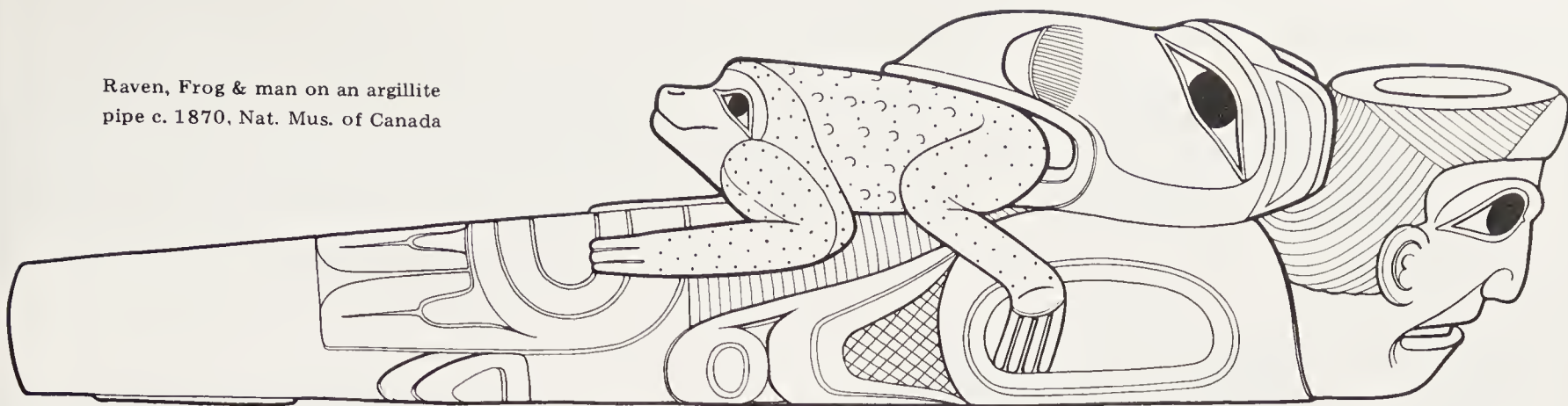
There certainly was not much to play with or change on this deserted beach, with no companions except the rapidly expiring sea creatures left stranded there. The Raven walked along getting more bored and restless by the minute.

He had almost decided to fly away to some more interesting spot even if it meant leaving all this lovely ripe food behind, but decided there must be something more on this beach. So he continued his stroll, calling out in frustration now and then.

"This is a fine place for food," he said, and "I must say that the big bright ball, the



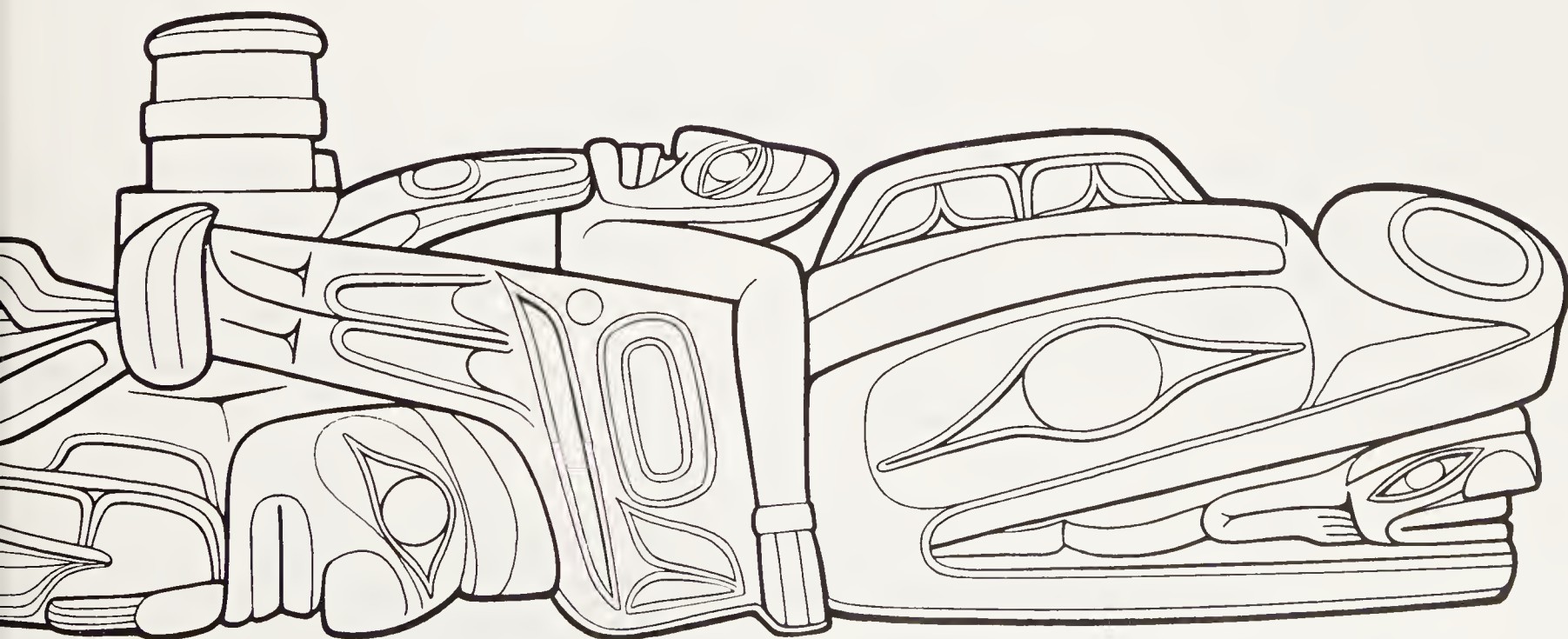
Raven, Frog & man on an argillite pipe c. 1870, Nat. Mus. of Canada

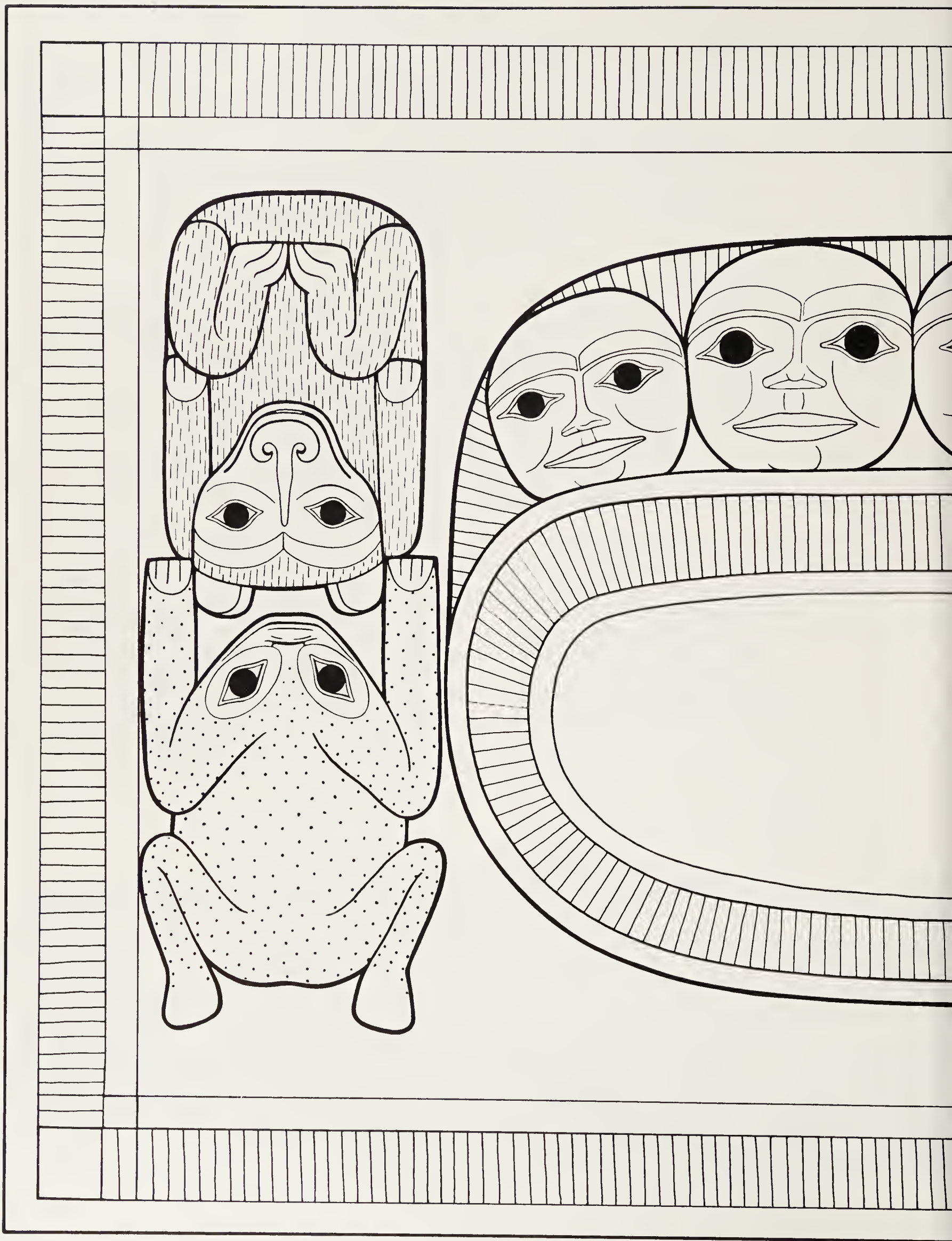


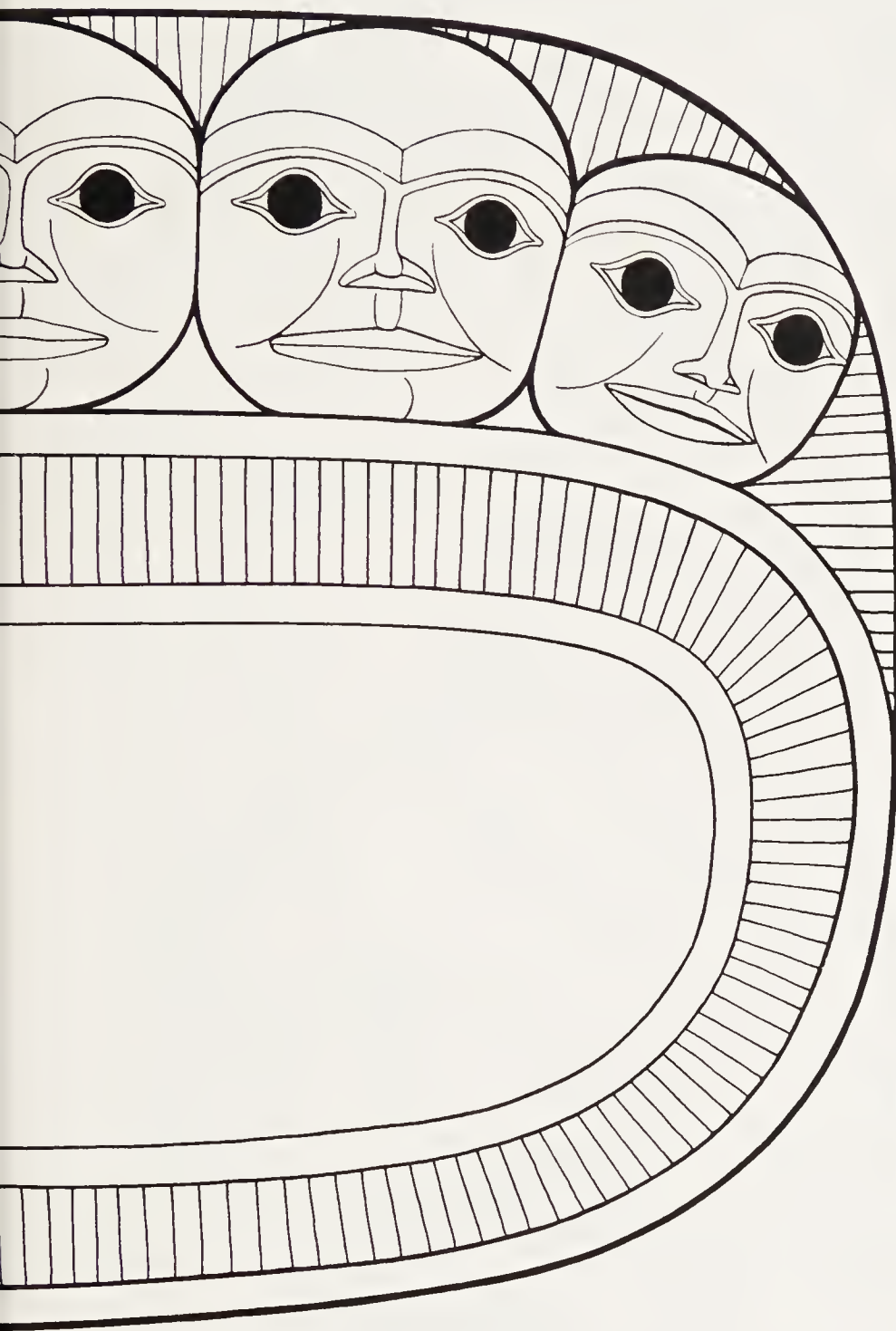
Sun, I stole from the old man and hung up there in the sky is a big improvement. But there certainly is not much to do here." He threw back his head and called to the empty sky in his loudest voice, "Isn't there anybody anywhere?" Almost immediately he heard an answering cry. Well, not so much a cry as a little squeak, which seemed to come from far beneath him. At first he saw nothing, except a remarkably large clamshell half buried in the sand.

"I have seen lot of clams in my time," he said, "but the most noise they have been able to make was a sort of a squishy sound. So this is at least a different kind of clam." He leaned closer and saw that the shell was an old one and that its original occupant had long since departed. It was now filled with a mass of squirming creatures all trying to hide from the enormous black shape that seemed intent on destroying them.

If the Raven had not eaten so much so recently, the little creatures might have become part of his dinner, and the world would have been a much different place. But his curiosity at the moment was much stronger than his appetite. So instead of picking up the shell and dropping it on a rock to break it open, he very gently, using his most charming and seductive voice, a lovely bell-like croon, certainly one of the most beautiful sounds in the world, which seems to come from the roots of the mountains, from the wellsprings of the sea, from the caves where the winds are born, he coaxed the little creatures to come out of their shell. He told them of the land that waited for them, covered with great red cedar trees from which they could build their big houses and seagoing canoes, and in time tall totem poles to commemorate their great deeds. He sang of the restless seas, which every year would bring the salmon to the













From House 7, Masset

rivers and be the home of the great whales, the porpoises, the seals and sea lions, the sea otters and all the fish, which would feed them through their time on earth.

So with much hesitation, afraid but unable to resist, they finally came out.

Very strange creatures they were: two legs like the Raven, but no shiny feathers on their bodies or wings. In fact no wings at all, just long thin appendages which moved constantly. Except for their shiny black hair on their round heads, they were naked, quite the strangest creatures the Raven had ever seen — these first people — who were to become Haida.

For a long time the Raven amused himself with his new playthings, teaching the men and women all kinds of clever tricks: how to build the beautiful Haida canoes which took them on fishing and sea hunting trips, and, as they grew in numbers, to visit and trade or go to war with their neighbors.

He watched the children grow up and have children of their own, and the old people die. He watched some of them become chiefs and some slaves, and he saw the chiefs prove how great they were by building great houses,



Left: Raven on a housepole, Field Mus. Nat. Hist.
Bottom: a carved argillite shaman, Glenbow Mus.

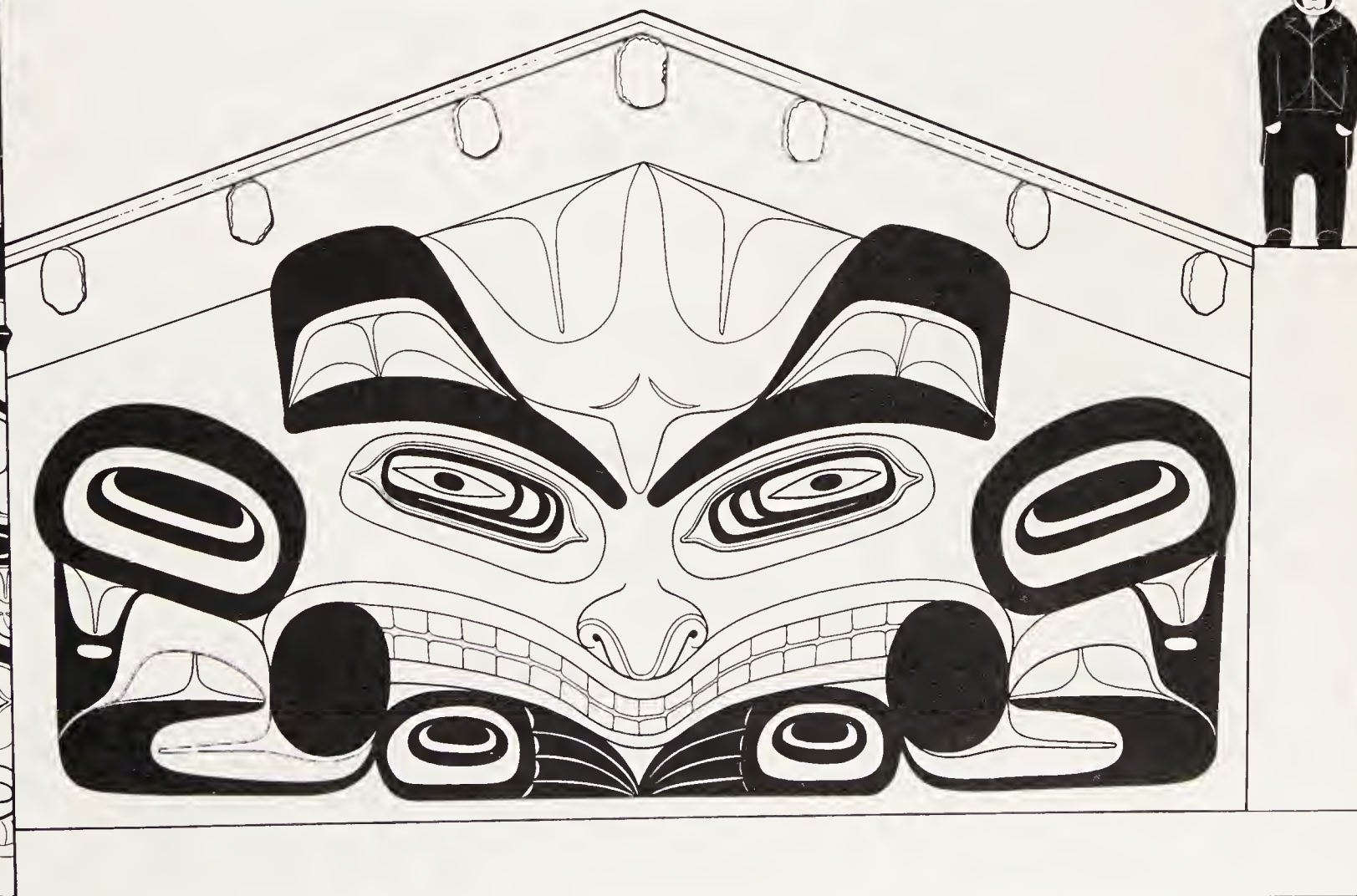
beautifully decorated with carvings telling of their heraldic pasts, and filled with exquisite ceremonial works of art to be used at the great winter feasts. He watched them dance and listened to them sing, and enjoyed the stories they told, particularly those about him.

It was a fine game he played with the little people from the clamshell, and it lasted for many centuries.

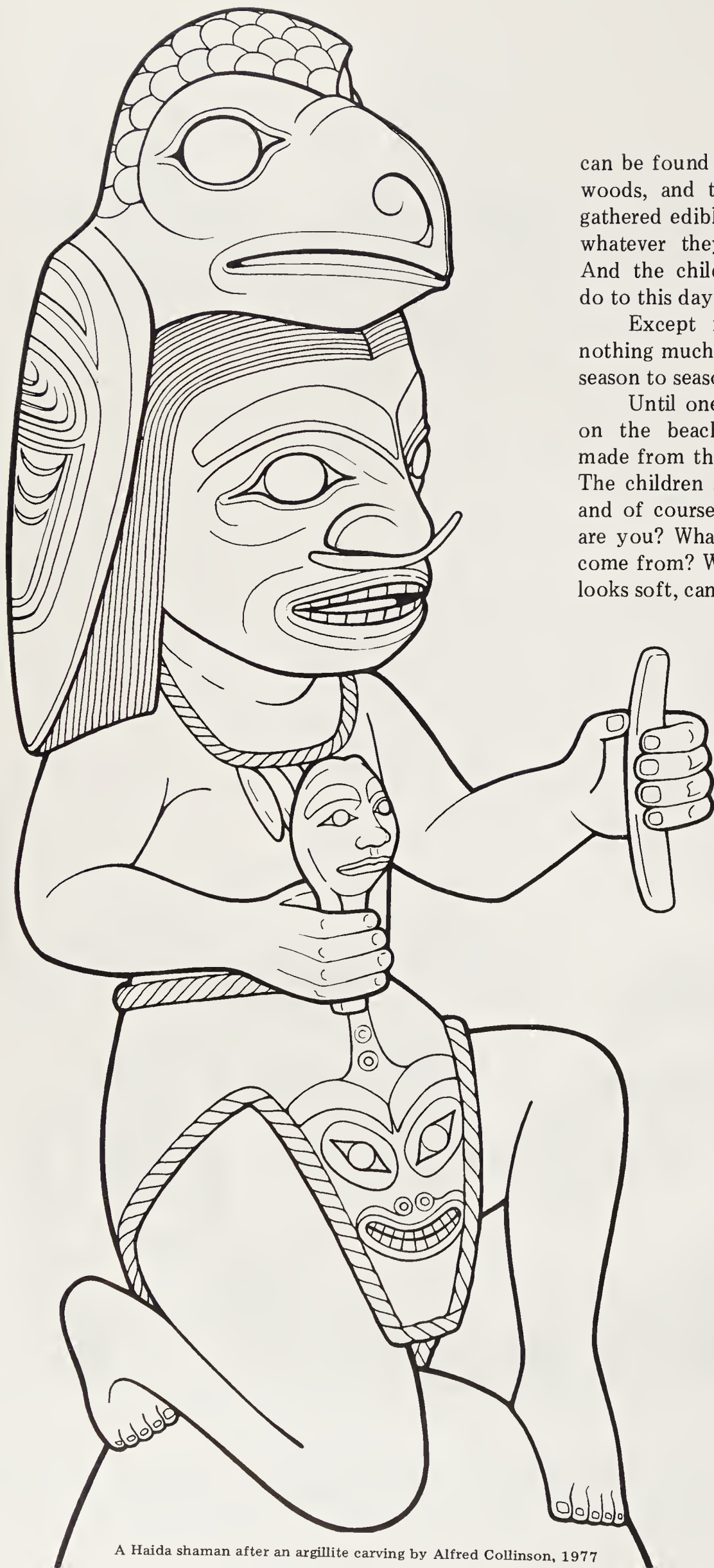
It was probably the Raven who first saw, as faint as a distant cloud on the horizon, the first white sail.

THE FLOOD

A very long time ago, all the Haida people lived in one big village on the north-west coast of *Haida Gwaii*. They lived on the seashore, as their descendants do today, but they had not yet learned how to build the beautiful strong seaworthy canoes which in time would enable them to travel over the seas and harvest fish and other foods which



Grizzly Bear's Mouth House, No. 5, Skidegate, after a model in the Field Mus. of Nat. Hist., Chicago. The roof figure was the Victoria town clerk, who had put one of the residents in jail. Passers by would point up and ridicule him. The pole shows Raven above Beaver, & Eagle above.



can be found there. So the men hunted in the woods, and the women picked wild berries, gathered edible roots, collected and preserved whatever they could find on the seashore. And the children, of course, did what they do to this day. They played on the beach.

Except for the everchanging weather, nothing much changed from day to day, from season to season, from year to year.

Until one day a strange woman appeared on the beach, wearing a strange garment, made from the fur of some unknown animal. The children saw her first and ran up to her and of course began to ask questions. "Who are you? What is your name? Where do you come from? What is that you are wearing? It looks soft, can I feel it?"



Three Haida shamans from Masset, c. 1880, after Dossetter, Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.



The woman said nothing, so one of the boys reached out and grabbed her garment and in so doing, pulled it in such a way that her back was uncovered. The children jumped backward in surprise and fright because growing along her backbone were barnacles and chitons, sea creatures which usually grow in colonies on rocks in the sea. Who was she really? Part human and animal? Or part human and plant? Or part human and sea-rock? Or maybe all of these at the same time? An aquatic woman for sure.

The old people of the village and the parents of the children heard their clamor and told them to stop laughing at the stranger. For a while they were silent. While all this was happening the tide reached low ebb, and the strange woman sat down at the water's edge. The tide began to rise, and the water touched her feet. So she moved up the beach a little and sat down. The water rose up to her, and again she moved back. Before long she reached the high tide mark, but still the water continued to rise and the tide kept on rising; never before had the tide risen so high.

The villagers grew frightened wondering how they could escape the flood. The chief, very determined to save his fellow tribesmen, told them to gather all the drift logs which were there now floating around them, and to tie them strongly together to make a large raft, large enough to carry the whole population. The children went first, followed by their parents and grandparents, who came with baskets filled with spring water to drink, as well as dried salmon and halibut for provisions.

Meanwhile the stranger continued to sit until the tide reached her. Then she would move to higher ground, above the beach and the village, up the hillside, up to the slopes of the nearby mountain, until at last she sat on its very peak. The whole island now was covered by the sea.



A female shaman & Killer Whale, Lowie Museum, Univ. of California, Berkeley



Raven (?) at sea, from a carved argillite plate, Nat. Mus. of Ireland

The people on the raft kept drifting about, unable to stop anywhere as they had no anchor. Occasionally, as the winds and currents continued to move them in these dark blue waters, they saw very far away some other rafts coming from other directions carrying the inhabitants of other remote places. But they never got close enough to find out who the strange people were.

Finally one day they saw the peak of a mountain showing above the water. They tried to direct the raft toward it, as any land was preferable to their eternal drifting, but the current swept them away again.

They were bitterly disappointed, but cheered up as every day more and more land appeared. The flood was dropping fast.

Finally the raft grounded over a rocky point, and some of the people went ashore. There was not room for very many so they pushed off again and drifted until they grounded again. They kept doing this until all the people and the raft were safely ashore.

Wherever they stopped, they built a new village and that is the way all the villages of *Haida Gwaii*, the Queen Charlotte Islands, were established: Tanu, Skedans, Kunhalas, Cumshewa, Kaisun, Chaatl, Lina, Skidegate, Haina, Tian, Kiusta, Yaku, Dadens, Yan, Hielllan, Kayang, Masset.

HOW THE RAVEN GOT FRESH WATER

The great flood had at last receded, but all the water on the earth was salty and unfit to drink.

The Raven in his home in *Haida Gwaii*, the Queen Charlotte Islands, had just heard that Godj, the Wolf, who lived in a big house on the mainland to the north, kept the only spring of water carefully concealed. "Why don't I look for it?" he said to himself. He did not feel like flying and decided to paddle his canoe across the channel over to Godj's island. His canoe was very elegant, long and



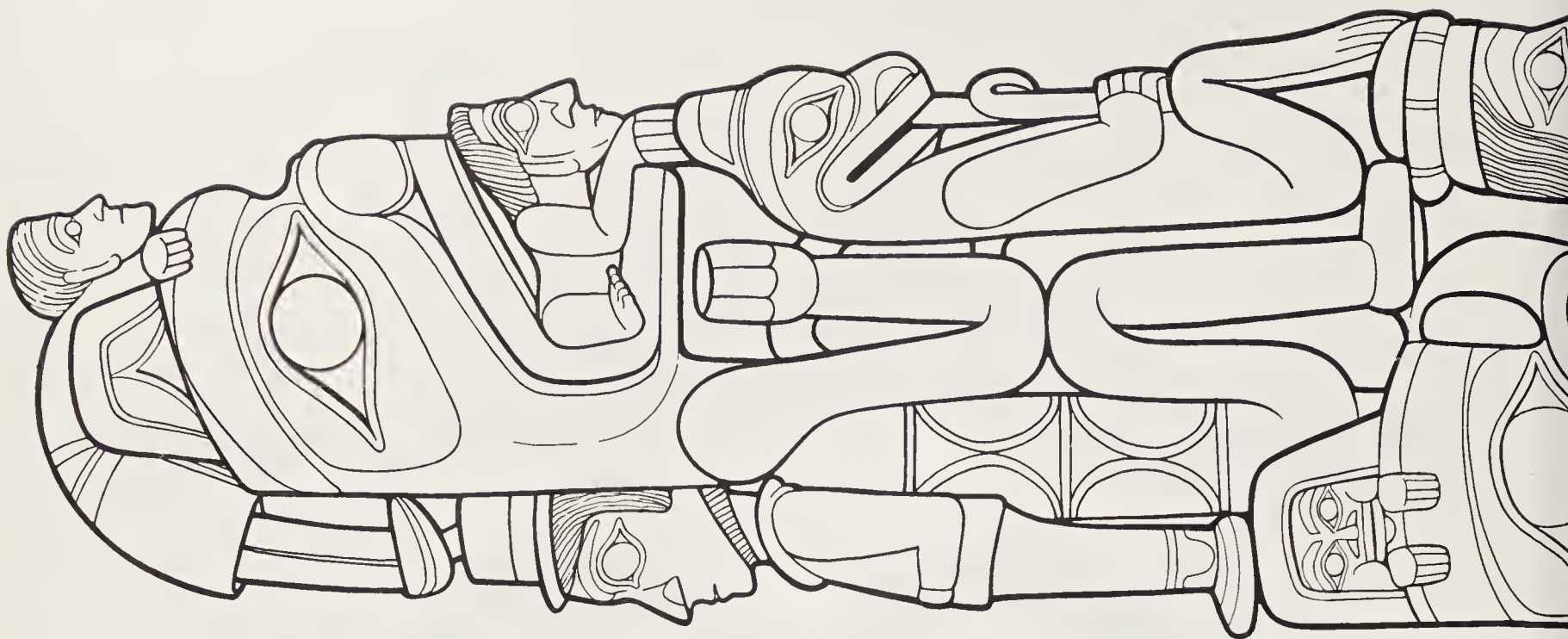
narrow, painted with beautiful designs. He travelled very fast, and soon reached Godj's house. The Wolf invited him to come in, as a polite host would do. "I am very thirsty after my long trip. May I have some water?" asked the Raven.



From the Wolf House, Saxman (Tlingit)



Raven as a person, from a carved crown, Nat. Mus. of Canada



Godj went to the spring and came back with a bowl full of water, which he offered to his visitor.

As it was getting late, the Wolf soon felt tired and fell asleep. He was a great sleeper. The Raven meanwhile drank all the water in the bowl and flew up to the ceiling of the Wolf's house and tried to leave through the smoke hole. He had drunk so much water, however, that he got stuck and could not get through. The sound of his flapping wings awoke Godj, who got very angry at the sight. Very quickly he piled up green fir boughs on the fire, creating a thick smoke which almost choked the thief.

With a great effort the Raven squeezed through the smoke hole and escaped, but he bears traces of this adventure to this day: his feathery cloak has been changed from pure white to sooty blackness forever.

As the Raven flew away, gasping to restore his breath and recover from his fright, drops of fresh water trickled down from his bill. These drops, falling on the mainland, became lakes and ponds of fresh water. From these, streams and rivers flowed in all directions forging their ways through canyons to become wide rivers flowing into the sea. By the time he reached his home in *Haida Gwai*,

only a few drops of water remained in his bill. This is why there are no large streams in Haida country today.

THE RAVEN AND THE SALMON

The Raven had discovered the first people. Then after the flood he provided them with fresh water by creating the lakes, rivers and streams, but he still had to populate these empty waters with all kinds of fish for himself and the Haida people to feed on.

While travelling about one day, the Raven saw in the distance two men whom he knew to be Beavers. Before they caught sight of him he took the form of an old man, and when they came closer he greeted them as good friends. The Raven looked so friendly that the two men invited him to go home with them and offered him a place to sleep and food to eat for as long as he wanted to stay.

They lived in a huge traditional Haida house made of red cedar planks with handsome carved interior house-posts representing the Beaver crest. Inside, at the very back of the house, was a doorway screen with an entrance leading into what appeared to be a storage space. On the sides of the entrance hung the skulls of two mountain sheep. One



of the men took a skull in each hand, and banged them together, causing sparks to fly. These set fire to a pile of wood, and soon a good fire was burning in the center of the house. The other man in the meantime had gone behind the screen and returned, carrying some fresh salmon for their dinner.

During the meal, the Raven, who is usually a glutton, restrained himself and ate sparingly, playing his role of an old and well mannered man rather well; but of course it was very much against his inclination.

The Raven decided to stay as long as it would take him to discover the secret of the Beavers' food supply. He noticed that whenever the men needed fresh salmon they went to the back of the house and returned with all they needed.

He waited until one day his hosts went out gambling, leaving him alone. As soon as they left, the Raven decided to investigate the storage space at the back of the house, behind the screen. Instead of a place for keeping fish, to his amazement and delight, he discovered a complete lake and river system teeming with salmon, with fish traps already in place to catch them. In the presence of all that food, he soon forgot the conventions, table manners and etiquette

required of him while he was a guest in the Beavers' house, and quickly gobbled up as many fish as he could possibly hold. As the salmon berries were ripening in abundance along the lake, he picked a basketful and ate them also. It took quite some time and much more food to satiate his appetite, and he would have kept on eating even then but it was now time to stop as the Beavers were coming back from gambling.

After a good night's sleep, the next day, the Beavers decided to go gambling again. This time the Raven decided to steal the lake, the rivers and all the fish as well as the land around them. The trouble was that they were far too big for the Raven to carry. But a little difficulty like that never stopped so determined a master of magic as he, so he simply rolled the lake up like a mat and put it in his beak.

The Beavers were on their way home and as they reached the threshold of their house, they saw the Raven trying to fly away with their property. The rolled up landscape was so heavy that he could only fly a short distance at a time, stopping often to rest in whatever tree was nearby.

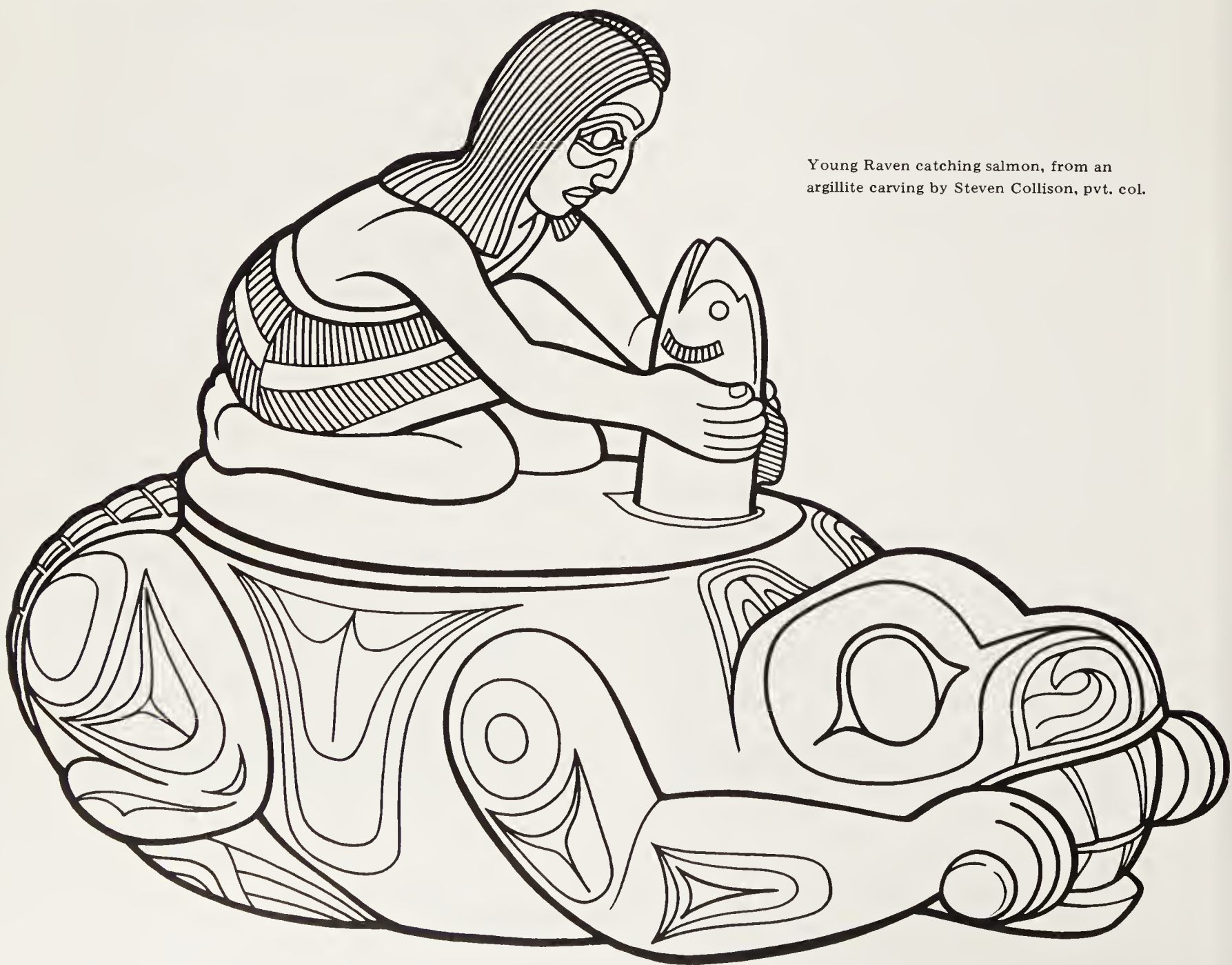
The returning gamblers knew they could not catch the Raven as long as he was flying,

or perched in a high tree, but they quickly formed a plan which they hoped would catch the thief and recover their food supply. It meant returning to their natural forms, to Beavers, and using their powerful gnawing teeth to cut down the tree where the Raven was perched. However as soon as they attacked the first tree the Raven flew to another one. They felled several trees on which the Raven had perched but just before the trees began to fall, the Raven flew to a safer perch. In despair they sent the Marten and the Loon to pursue him, but they also failed to catch him.

The farther the Raven flew with his burden the easier it was for him to carry it. Soon he felt strong enough for the long

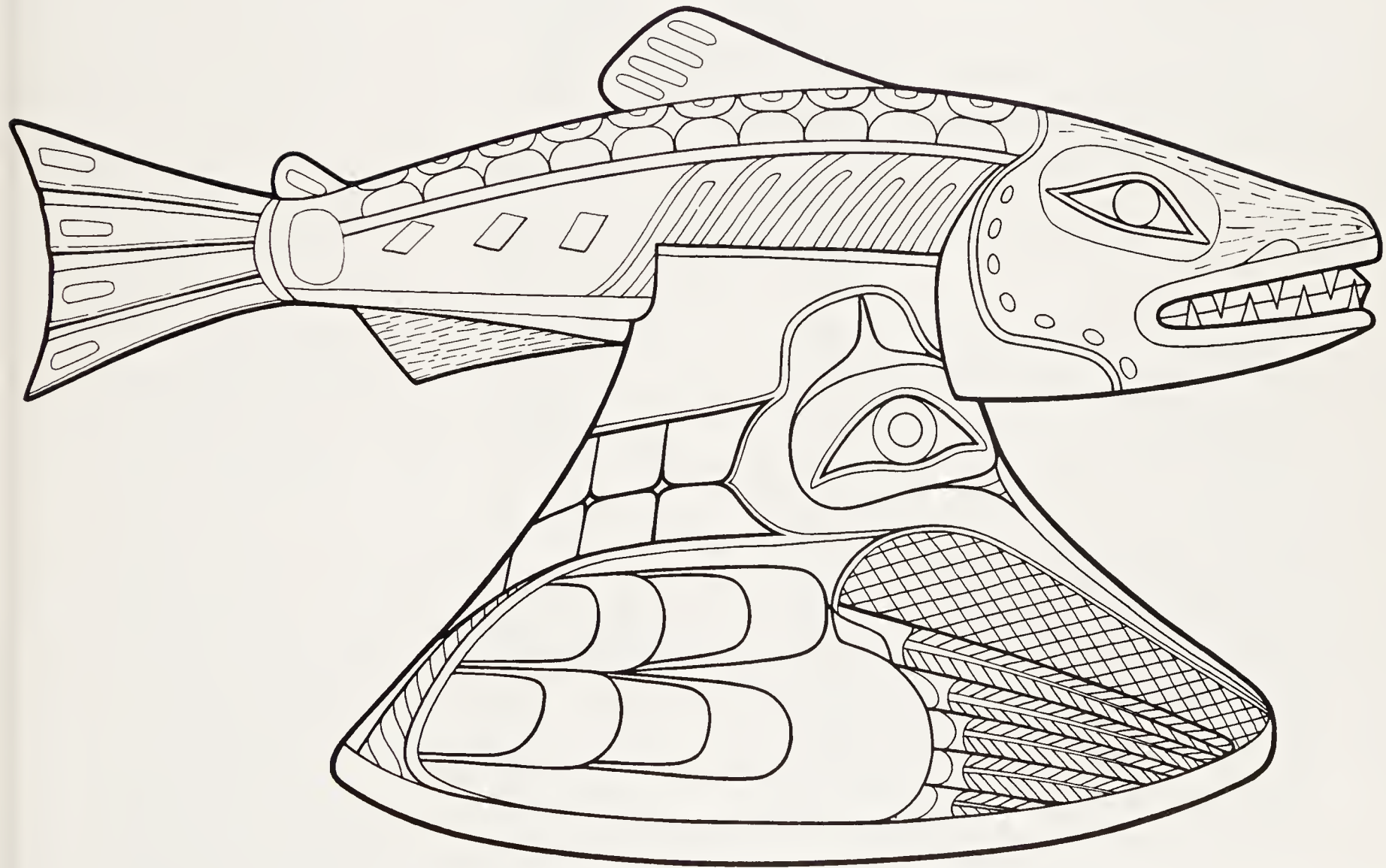
flight to *Haida Gwaii*. There he dropped the lake and streams and salmon berry bushes, and planted the salmon in pairs, one female and one male in all the waters of the islands. In time the fish multiplied and supplied the favorite food to the Raven and incidentally to the Haida people as well.

After the Raven had brought salmon to the people, he travelled to the mainland coast and went to gather a good supply of candlefish, called *oulachen*, the magic fish of the Northwest Coast, and he distributed it in the mouth of the rivers in the mainland for the Northwest Coast natives to process so as to obtain the "fragrant, delicious oil used to enhance the flavor of dried salmon and halibut, or to mix with dried berries, to flavor

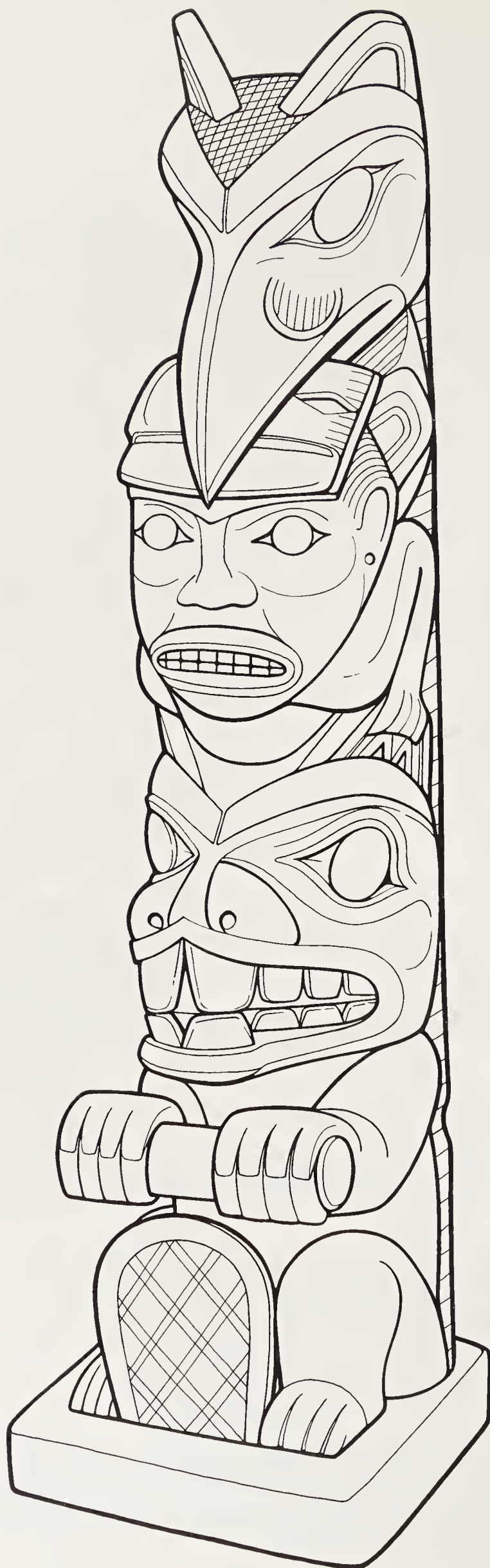


Young Raven catching salmon, from an argillite carving by Steven Collison, pvt. col.

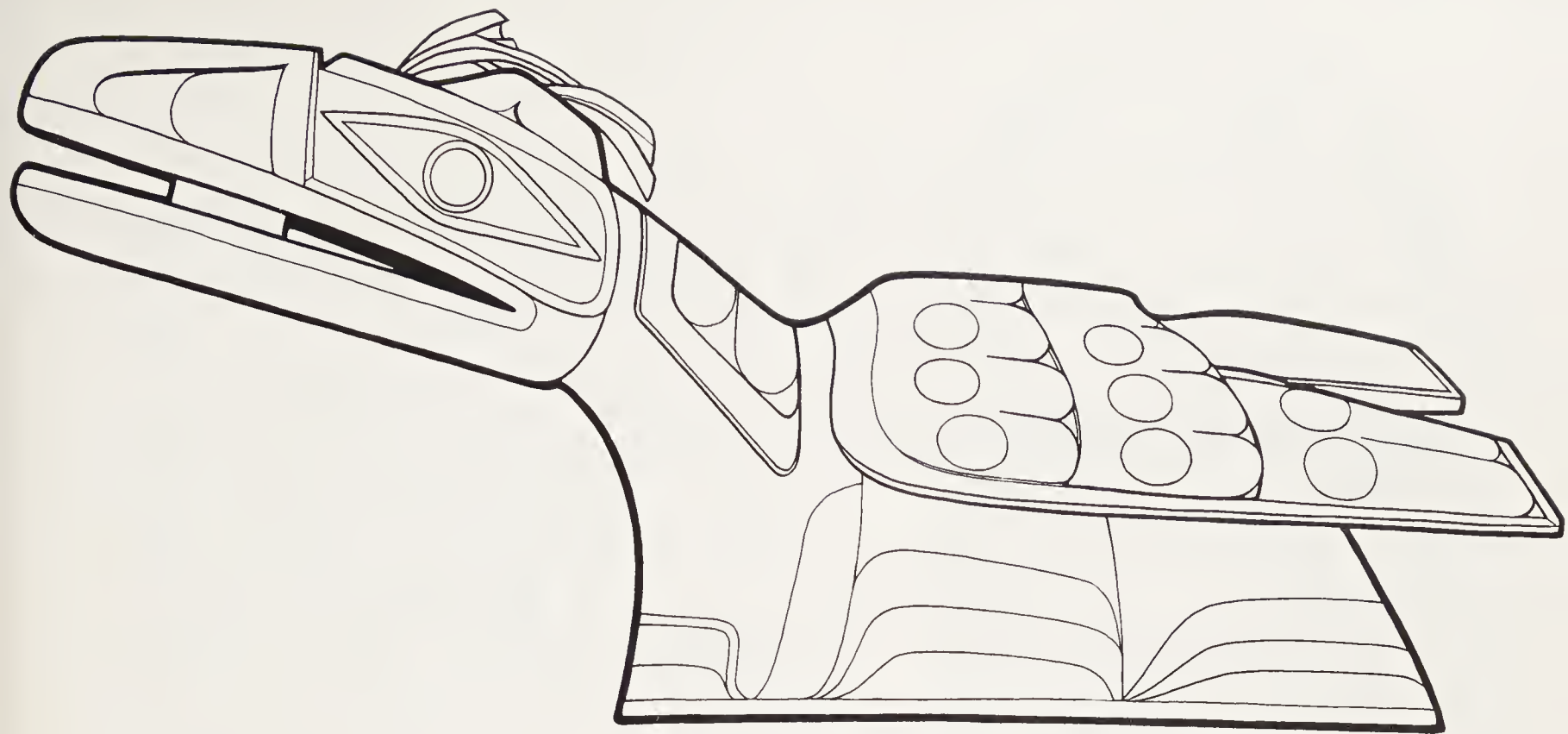
stews and, though they did not know this, to provide most of the stored nutrients necessary for life in the too-often sunless seasons.”¹ As there were no *oulachen* in *Haida Gwai*, the Haida people traded their beautiful canoes and other carvings for some of this rare and unctuous oil.



¹ Bill Reid and Adelaide de Menil, 1971, *Out of the Silence*, Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, U.S.A.



Raven as both bird & human holding Beaver's house (or a fish trap), and Beaver holding a gnawing stick; from an argillite pole, Nat. Mus. of Canada



THE RAVEN AND THE BALL OF LIGHT

Darkness had covered the earth for a long time and the Raven was fed up with it. He couldn't see a thing, not even himself in this dark world, as his black shiny plumage was indistinguishable from the ever-black night.

One day, he heard a rumor that the old fisherman who lived alone except for his pretty daughter at North Island kept a ball of bright light hidden in his big house by the sea. The Raven wanted to end the age of darkness in which he was living, so he decided to steal the light and release it in the world.

The next summer, that is, during the season when salal berries ripen, he changed himself into a dark green shiny salal leaf. The fisherman's daughter was gathering salal berries in a wild fruit patch and while eating some of the small, juicy blue fruit, she swallowed the leaf. As soon as the Raven entered her body, he changed again from a leaf to an unborn human baby, who in the fullness of time emerged in the normal way, much to the surprise and baffled annoyance of the girl and her father.

The baby grew with amazing speed and soon became a very mischievous child and at the same time a very appealing one. He soon became a great favorite of his grandfather. The old man gave him everything he wanted, until one day he began to cry for the ball of light which was kept in a bent corner box. For many days the grandfather refused this request but finally, by begging and crying, the Raven overcame his resistance and persuaded the old man to give him the light. "Give my grandson what he is asking for; give him the ball of light," he said to his daughter. The young mother went behind the screen at the back of the big house and brought back the wooden chest beautifully ornamented with abalone shell in which the bright ball of light was kept.

She opened the box and in it was another box, which she also opened. She found a third box, a little smaller, inside; after the third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, until she reached the tenth box. This last box was very carefully wrapped in a fine net made of nettle fiber, which she removed to get at the



Above: the Eagle & the Bear in a halo; below:
the little boy, held by his mother, holds
the ball of light



Raven holds the disk of light, the Frog sits
on his head; below, Beaver gnaws a stick

lid. She lifted the lid and a flood of light filled the big plank house as the sun itself appeared, for the first time, free, bright and round like a ball.

“Here’s your light,” said the young mother to her son, throwing it to him with a deft hand. “Take it!” The child caught it in its first flight through the air with great joy. But he soon began to whimper again, and his whimpering turned to tears and sobs.

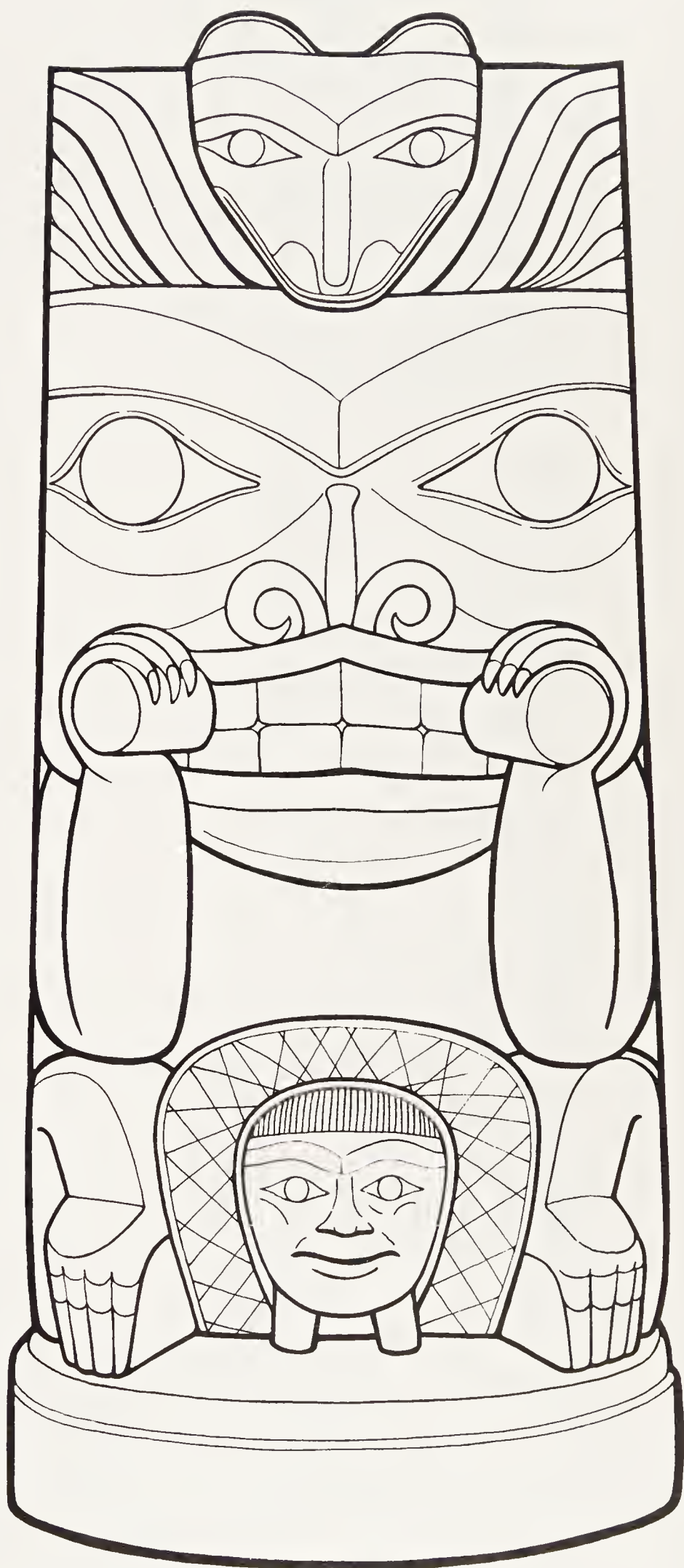
His grandfather, who could not bear to hear him cry, asked his daughter, “What is the matter with my grandson now?” She found out that the child had still another wish. The smoke hole of the big house was closed by the roof boards and the child wanted them removed. “Open the smoke hole for my grandson,” said the grandfather.

No sooner had she opened the smoke hole to the opaque black sky than the child immediately transformed himself into his real shape, that of the supernatural Raven. With the sun in his bill — some say under one of his wings — the Raven flew out of the smoke hole in the roof of the house.

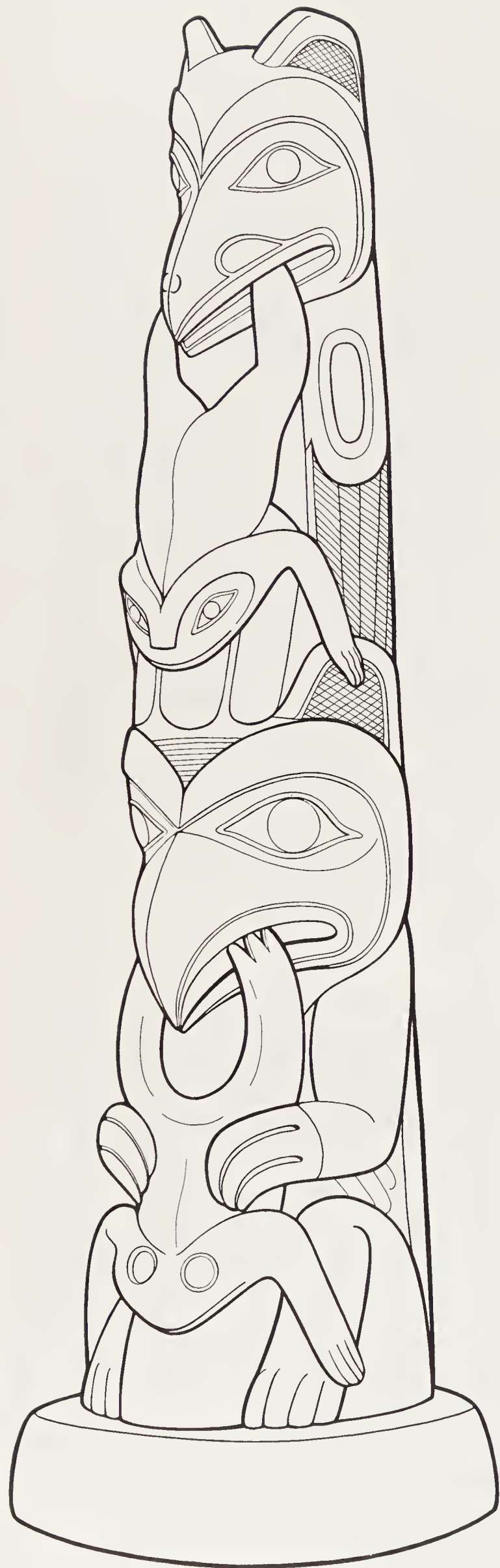
As he was flying away with his prize he encountered the Eagle who chased him and forced him to drop it. It fell and broke into many pieces, the large ones forming the Sun and the Moon, and the small ones the stars in the night sky.



Eagle from an argillite plate c. 1882, National Museum, Washington, D.C.



From a large (this size) & outstanding argillite totem pole carved by Charles Edensaw, National Museum of Canada



The Frog, which is not found in the Queen Charlotte Islands, came into Haida art along with the myths which were acquired by conquest or marriage with the people from the mainland. The Frog is associated with Volcano Woman. Volcano eruptions were often caused by ill-treatment of animals.

The Nass River volcano erupted for just such a reason. Once there were two large villages in a canyon with a year-round supply of salmon and wild berries. Since the people of these villages had what they needed to eat, they were wealthy.

But the young men of the villages began to disregard their people's customs. They killed or wounded animals for amusement and left their carcasses for crows and eagles to eat. The elders said, "Don't do this; the Great Chief in the Sky will take revenge if you keep on doing it." But the young men did not listen.

When the salmon began swimming upstream, the young men threw stones at them as they swam through shallow water. Then one young man thought of a new sport: catching humpback salmon, slitting their backs open, inserting slivers of pine pitch and lighting them on fire.

They did this by night, putting burning pine torches into the salmon's backs while they swam upriver. The elders were very perturbed and warned the young men again and again against such impious acts.

At the end of the salmon season, the tribes began to prepare for winter festivities. Then began a faint beating noise, as of the huge feast drums which hung from the house rafters. The young men scoffed at the noise, saying that ghosts were awakening, but the elders warned that they had brought great danger by mistreating the salmon and needlessly killing game.

The drumbeat was heard each day, but then it stopped, and the young men ridiculed their elders for their fears.

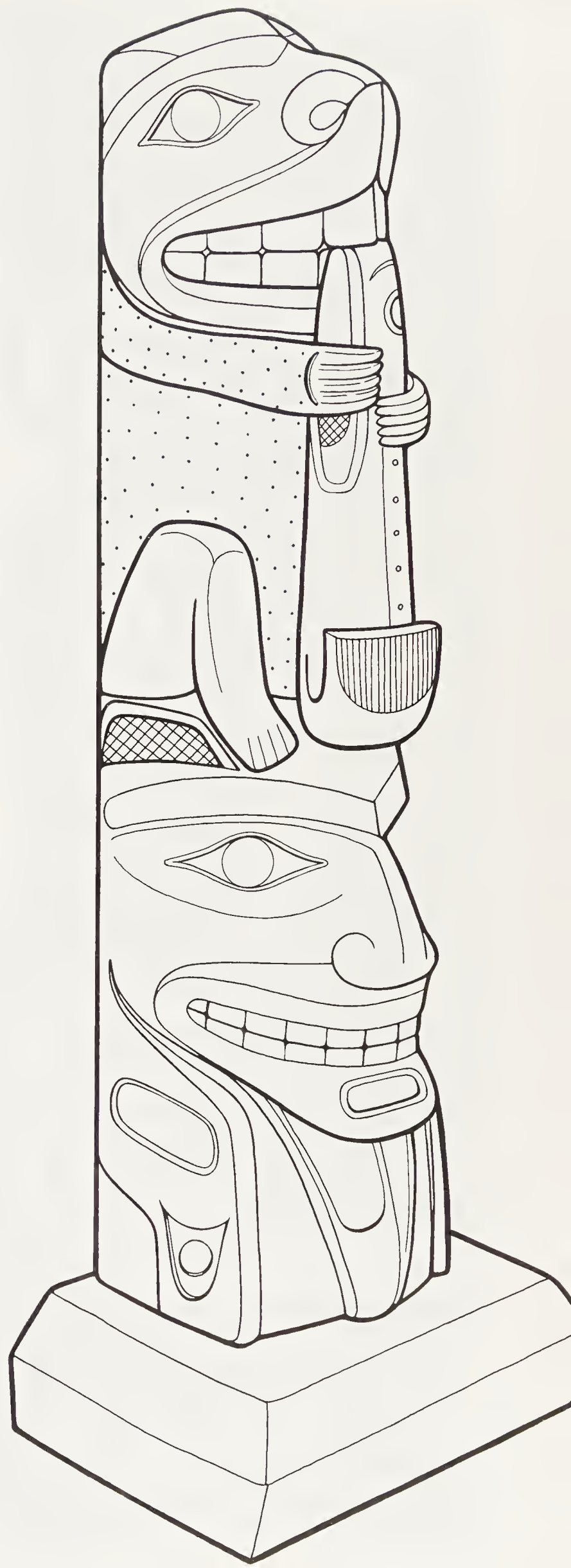
Then the drum beat began again, louder than before. Even the young men were now afraid. The elders asked why they were frightened of the drumbeats and why they had stopped boasting.

When the noise of thunder began and the river turned to fire, everyone tried to escape, but most perished. This catastrophe had been caused by the young men who put burning torches into the backs of salmon and so had offended the Chief of the Skies.

HOW THE RAVEN LOST HIS BILL

Once upon a time the Raven saw Rhaus-rhana, an old, blind halibut fisherman, sitting alone in a dugout canoe. His long kelp fishing line had devilfish on the hook as bait, and the Raven wanted the devilfish. Wrapping his wings around his body, he dived deep into the water and took the devilfish off the hook. Rhaus-rhana felt the line jerk and pulled on it so sharply that he broke the Raven's beak and pulled it up with the line. When the end of the line reached the surface, the fisherman was puzzled by the bill; he felt it, but did not know what it was. Once on shore, he asked his daughter to put it on the end of a stick on the roof of the lodge so that its owner might find it.

Meanwhile the Raven, wet and muddy, made his way out of the water. He had taken the form of a human, except for his wings and tailfeathers, so he was able to search the lodge for his bill without being easily noticed. When he spotted the bill on the stick on top of the lodge, he jumped up after it and tried to put it back where it belonged. But, as he flew away, the bill fell from his face and dangled beneath his chin.



Top: Bear eating a salmon; bottom: Raven & the fallen bill, from an argillite pole, private collection



NANASIMGAT

Nanasimgat lived with his wife in a town on the West Coast of *Haida Gwaii*. One day an unusually beautiful white sea otter came into the bay and swam about in front of the row of big houses where they lived. Immediately the hunters ran for their bows and arrows to shoot it. Nanasimgat's wife warned them to be careful how they shot, for they must not spoil the fur. "Shoot it on the end of its tail, where there is no risk of damaging it," she said. So they did, and the sea otter was dragged ashore and skinned.

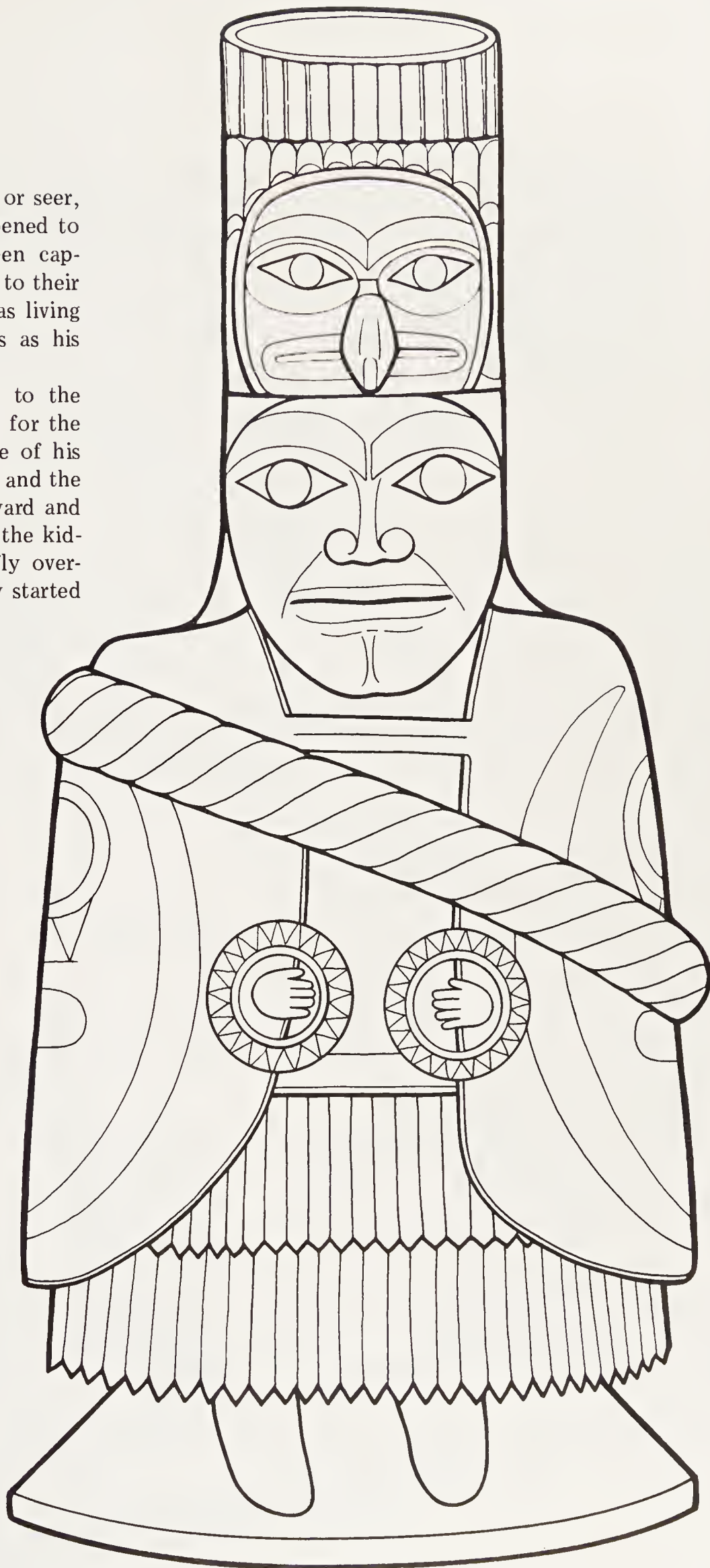
When the hunters spread the skin, they saw some blood stains smearing the beautiful shiny fur. Nanasimgat's wife went to the beach to wash them off and spread the pelt out in the salt water as the tide was rising.

A long time passed without her coming back home, and finally her husband, worrying about her, went out to look for her. The pelt had been washed ashore, but his wife had disappeared. He asked around if anyone had seen her, but the answer was always the same. Nobody had seen her anywhere; there was no trace of her anywhere around.

Left: Nanasimgat between Killer Whale's fins, Mrs. Nanasimgat inside Killer Whale, from a design by Bill Reid, 1980; top: Sea Otter and a butterfly from an argillite carving, c. 1857 in the National Museum of Denmark

Nanasimgat called on a shaman, or seer, to consult him about what had happened to his wife. He found out she had been captured by the Killer Whales and taken to their home under the ocean. Now she was living with the chief of the Killer Whales as his wife in the undersea world.

Nanasimgat decided to journey to the realm of the Killer Whales and search for the shade of his wife, with the assistance of his spirit helpers. These were the Marten and the Swallow. The Marten would go forward and smell out the trail bearing traces of the kidnapped lady. The Swallow was to fly overhead and guide him watchfully. They started



A Haida chief from an argillite carving, Bremen, Übersee-Museum

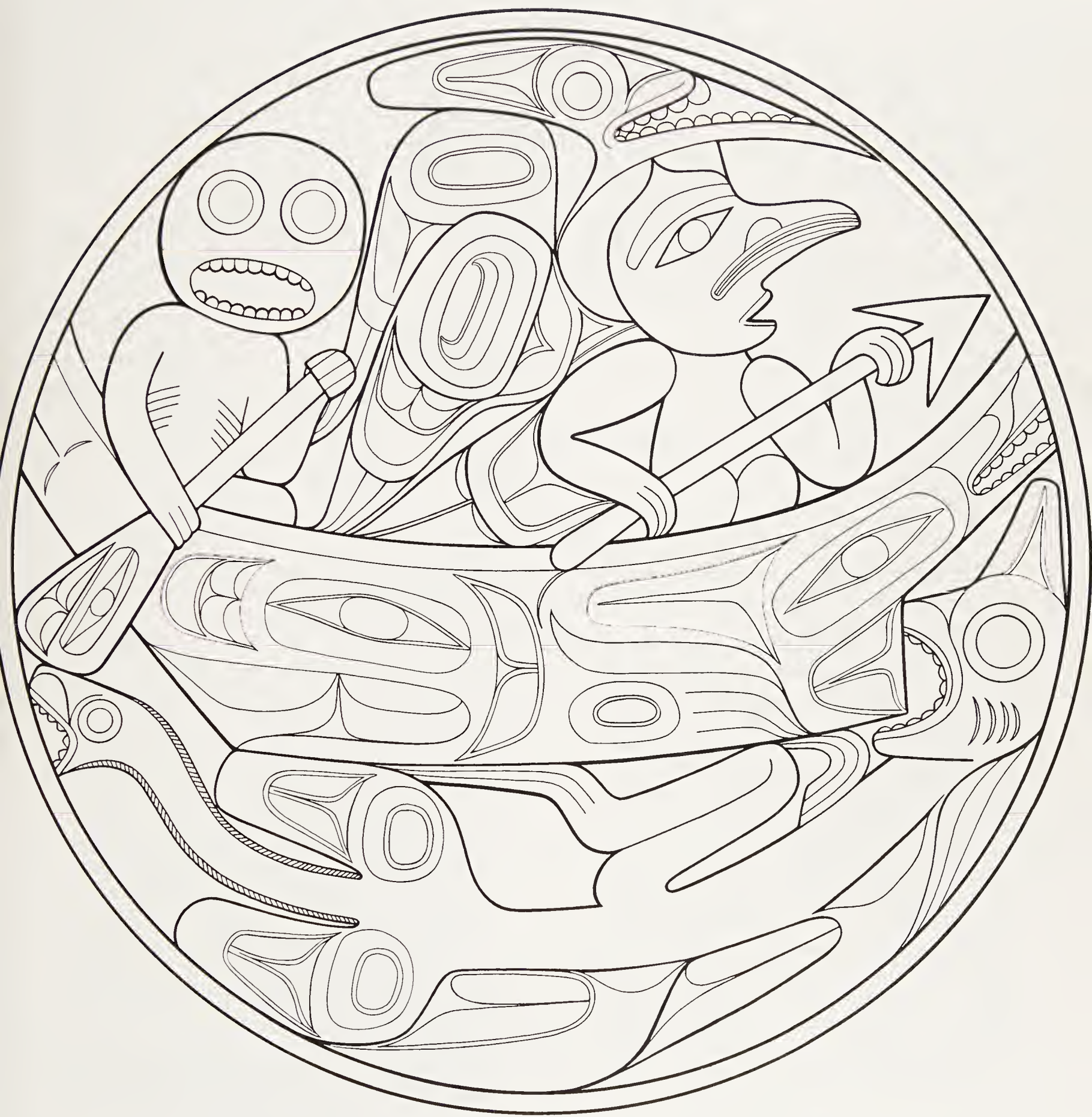
all three together on their fateful journey, the spirits constantly going and coming as they moved out to sea. As they had been told, they found a magic canoe drifting alone and empty a long way off. Nanasingat knew it would take him wherever he wanted to go, always travelling swiftly with nobody paddling. The three companions boarded the

enchanted vessel, and Nanasingat soon was skimming over the gentle waves, travelling faster than he ever had before, until they came to two floating beds of kelp, where the canoe stopped. There they held a council.

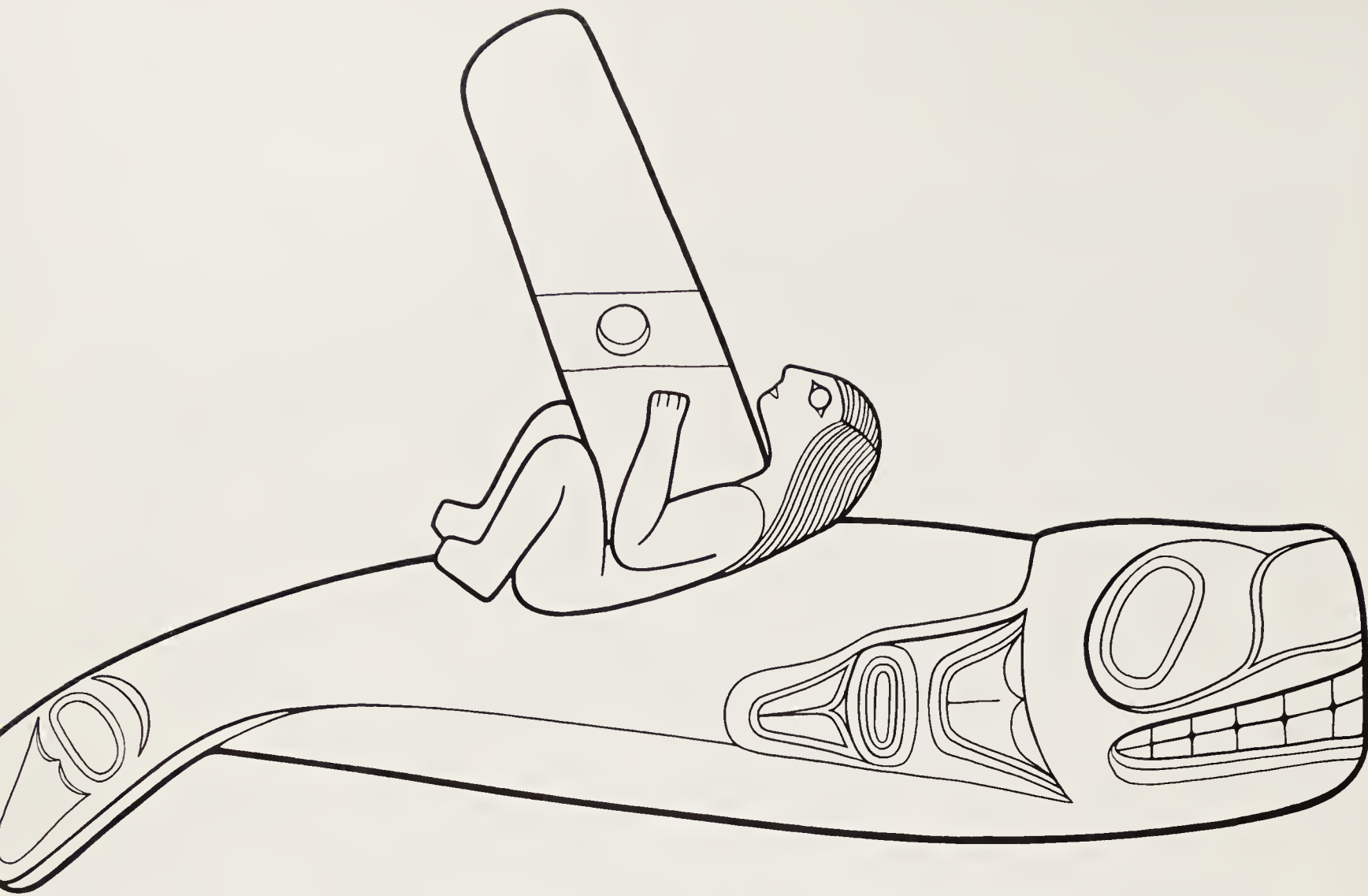
The Marten said: "From here you go on by yourself. Try to find the trail onward while I take care of the canoe and wait for



Nanasingat, his wife & the whale, from an argillite carving by Steven Collison, pvt. col.



Three at sea, from a carved argillite plate, Field Museum, Chicago

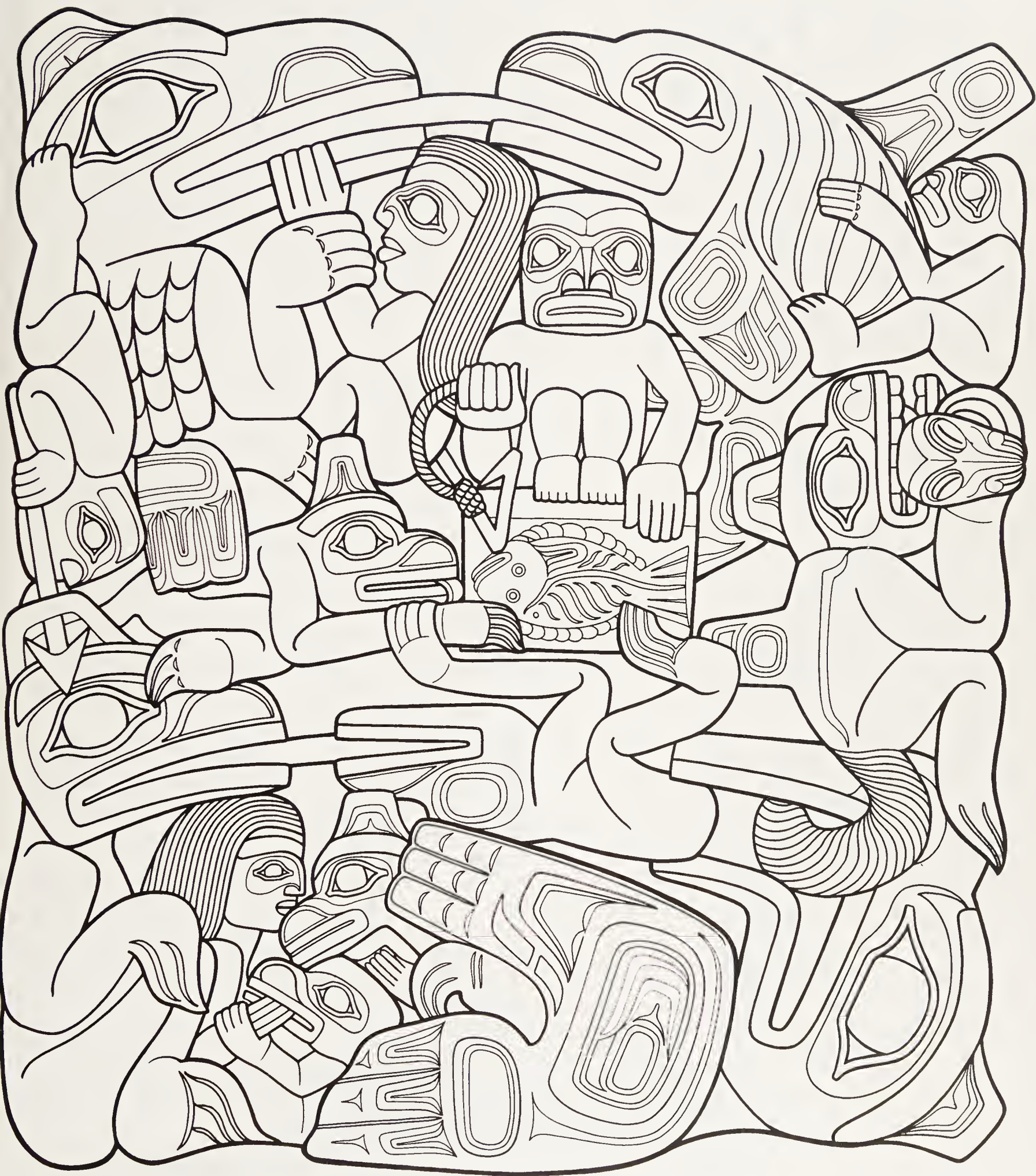


you until you return. All the Swallow can do is to go back to shore and keep the people informed of our doings.”

Magically enhanced with supernatural power, Nanasingat dived under water and looked for the path leading to the big house of the Killer Whale chief, where he was hoping to find his wife. With the long kelp lines to guide him, he travelled deeper and deeper until he noticed something that just looked like a jungle of worms wriggling and digging up roots on the floor of the ocean. As he approached, he realized that they were a flock of geese, and as he looked more closely, he saw they were all blind, so they were constantly stumbling into each other in their quest for food. Blind they might be, but their other senses were more acute than usual. As Nanasingat came near, they stopped and cried together, “We smell someone coming. His name is Nanasingat and he has come to reclaim his wife.”

As he stood there, gazing at them, he saw some strange men approaching. Three were slaves sent by their master to gather dry hemlock wood for his fire. One slave exclaimed, “Look, here is a dry piece of wood. Let me find out how suitable it is.” It was an old, dry, hollow trunk of a very large tree. One slave saw the hole in the trunk, crawled in, sat down inside and went to sleep, while the other two began to chop the tree. When it was about to fall, the slave using an axe gave a such powerful blow that it penetrated the sound outer wood, hitting the man inside in the mouth so hard that the axe blade was broken. The slave in the tree crawled out, and they all three grieved over the broken stone blade. “What can we do?” they said. “Our master will be angry with us, because we broke his axe.”

Nanasingat tried to console them, saying, “Listen. I can mend your broken axe if you help me in my search. I am travelling



Raven, Killer Whale & Nanasimgat's wife (on top), and Bear Mother (bottom, see following pages) from a wood carving by Bill Reid, British Columbia Provincial Museum



about in the underworld looking for my wife. She was kidnapped by the Killer Whale chief, and is now being held captive somewhere close to here. They agreed to the bargain. Nanasingat spat on the broken pieces and put them back together and returned the axe to them as good as it had ever been. The men then told him that they were slaves of the Killer Whale chief, and offered to show him the way to their master's house. When they came at last to the home, one slave pointed to the fire inside. A woman was standing there, warming herself. He saw her, but did not recognize her, because a long time had elapsed since she had been separated from her people.

As part of the plot to help Nanasingat to free his wife from the Killer Whale chief, the slaves went in as he waited outside. They hung a large container filled with water above the fire and piled dry wood on the brazier. When it was boiling hard, one of them pretended to fall down and upset the container which fell on the fire, extinguishing it by creating big clouds of vapor. The interior of the house was so befogged with white thick vapor that Nanasingat was now able to rush forward without being seen by the Killer Whale people. Very gently he told his wife who he was and asked her to follow him. As they were leaving the undersea town the slaves warned him, "Hold her fast! If you have a good hold of her, the Killer Whales will not be able to take her away from you again."

Nanasingat left the undersea world with the shade of his wife which, by the time they reached the Marten who was waiting for them in the canoe, had transformed itself into the beautiful woman she had always been. They reached home safely, their arrival being announced by the Swallow. The people of the village had prepared a feast to celebrate their return.

Nanasingat's wife could not recognize many of them, as she had been gone for many days and many months. Some say that she had disappeared for four years.

Once the wife of the halibut fisherman Rhausrhana admired a red-robin feather which Raven wore on his head. When she asked him for some feathers like it, Raven went off with her husband to hunt for robins. They took the fisherman's canoe to the island where the robins were found. After they had landed, the Raven picked up some decayed wood and threw it amidst the trees, wishing it to turn into robins. The fisherman followed the robins into the trees, while the Raven went back to the canoe and paddled away to the fisherman's village.

When he arrived at the village, he turned himself into a man just like the fisherman and stayed with his wife. Finally, Rhausrhana returned to his home and learned that the imposter was there. He had his servant block up the smoke hole so that he could not escape. The Raven, seeing that he was found out, turned back into his own form and flew around the house, trying to escape, but there was no way out. The fisherman flayed him with a club and dragged his carcass around the house. Then he took it outside and put it into the toilet hole. The Raven looked dead, but when people squatted at the hole he called insults to them. When Rhausrhana heard about this, he beat the Raven still more and threw his remains far out into the sea.

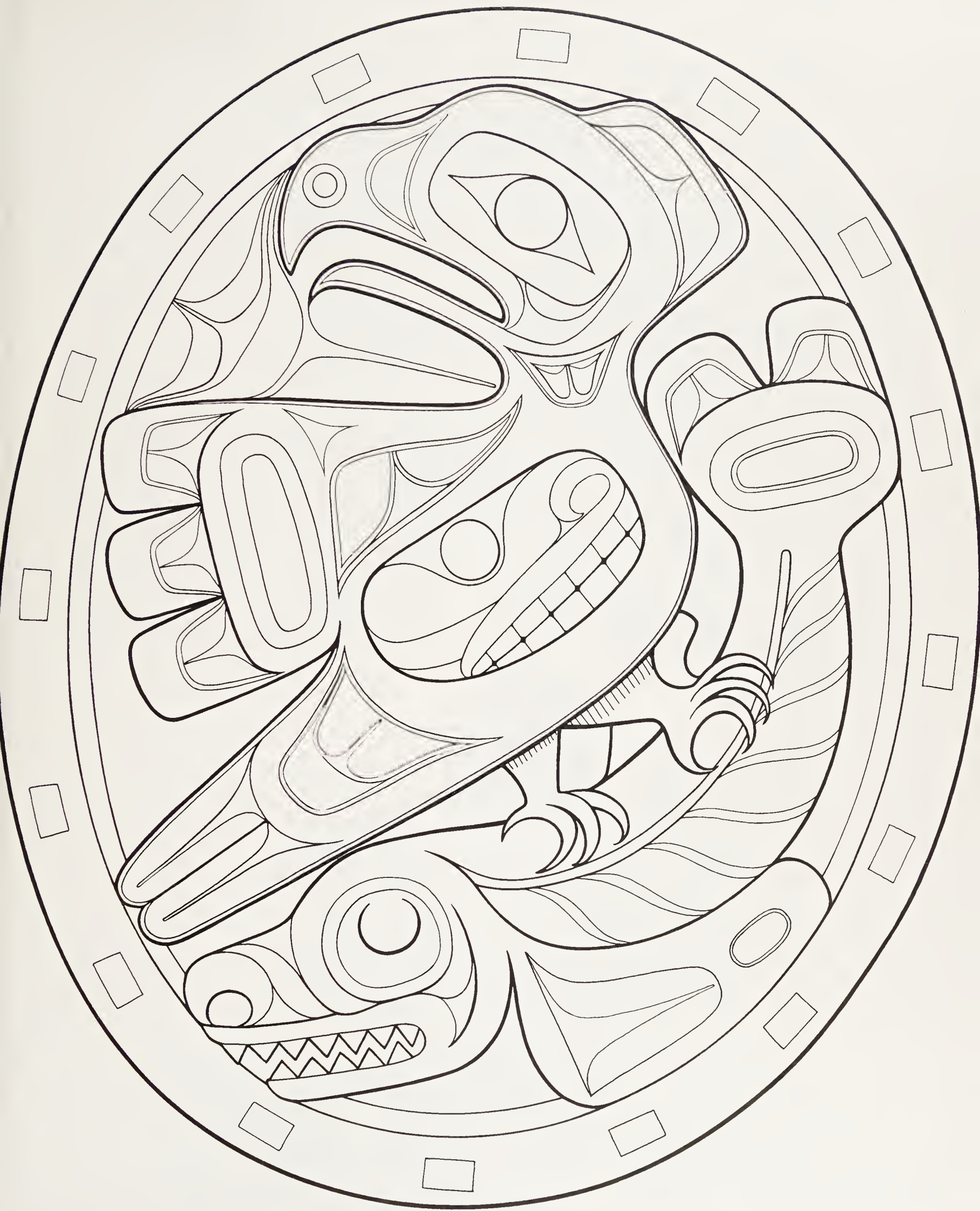
The Raven wished that the Whale would sawllow him, and so it did. Once he was inside, he tortured the Whale until it stranded itself on the shore near some Haidas. They began to cut the Whale up and eat some of the fat, and the Raven flew out of the hole they had cut in its side.

The Raven flew to the village of these Haidas and changed himself into an old man. Then he walked to the shore, where they were still talking about his escape as they cut up the whale. He spoke to them and told them he would destroy them unless they went away from their village. The whole tribe ran away and left the village and its food in the hands of the trickster, Raven.



Killer Whale again, with a Haida hero,
Stone Ribs, as a halibut inside, from
an argillite, Alaska State Museum





Whale again, here with Thunderbird, from an argillite plate, Nat. Mus. of Canada

THE BEAR MOTHER AND FATHER

A long time ago Rhpisunt was gathering huckleberries on the mountain with two other young women. Instead of singing like the others to warn the Bears of her presence there, as she should have done, she kept chatting and laughing while gathering the wild, tiny red fruit. The Bears finally pricked up their ears and listened. "Why does she always babble as if she were mocking someone?" they asked each other. Perhaps she was mocking them. This is why they decided to spy on her as she carried a large basket of fruit for the camp.

One evening all three women, one after the other, followed the trail, stooping under their loads, which were held on their backs by packstraps from their foreheads. Rhpisunt, the blabber, was the last of the three, a short distance behind the others. Suddenly she slipped, nearly fell down, and looked at her

feet. Then, bursting with angry laughter, she sneered, "Boo, there he dropped his poo. The bum!" Her packstrap broke, and while she tried to repair it, her sisters went on their way, leaving her far behind. Ill-tempered, she did not sing as she would have, but only scolded and groaned.

As it grew dark, she heard men's voices in the bush behind her. Then two young men, looking like brothers, came toward her and said, "Sister, you are in trouble, with nobody to look after you. Come with us, we will carry your berries for you." As she was following them she noticed that they were wearing bear robes. The Bears were taking her up to the mountain. After dark they came to a large house near a rockslide and entered with her. Around a small fire a number of Bear people were sitting, looking at her and her beauty, all of them dressed in black bear



The berry picker & the Grizzlies, from an argillite carving by Charles Edensaw, Nat. Mus. of Canada



Grizzlies & the berry
picker from an argillite
box carved by Charles
Edensaw, Nat. Mus. of
Canada



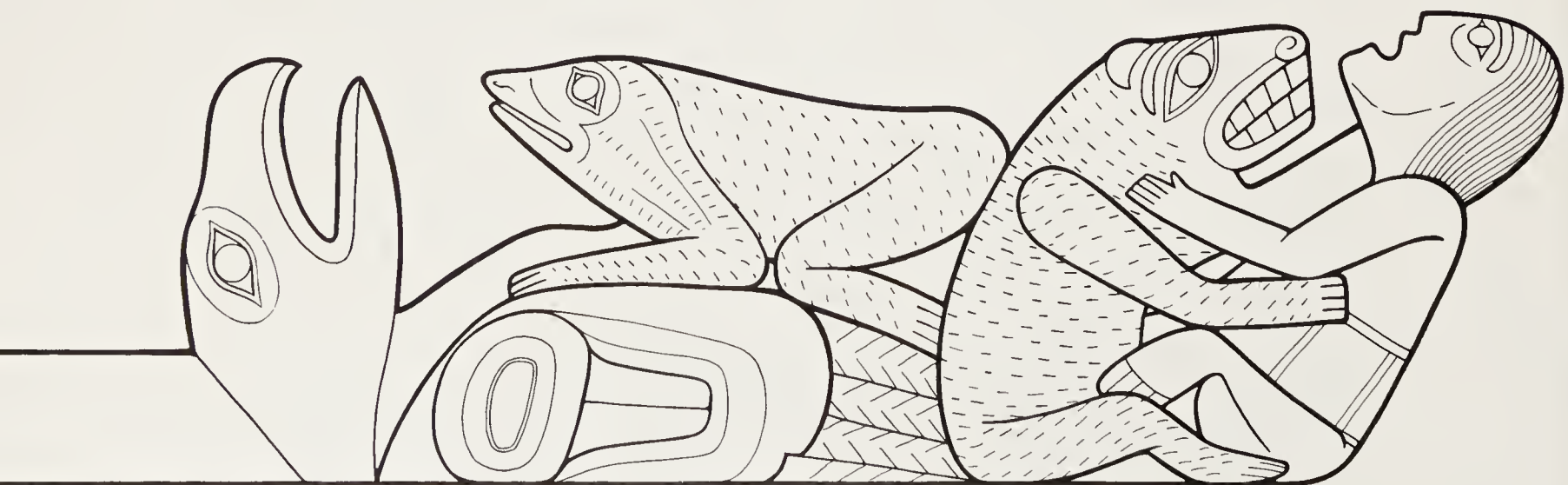
The berry picker & Grizzlies, from an argillite carving by Charles Edensaw, Field Mus. of Nat. Hist., Chicago

robes. The white mouse, Tseets, came to Rhipisunt, who had not seen her. Pulling at her shredded red cedar bark robe, to attract her attention, she said to her, "Young lady, the Bears have taken you to their den; from now on you shall be one of them, bearing Bear children."

As she heard this, she grew frightened, the more so when one of the young grizzlies approached her and said, "I am impressed

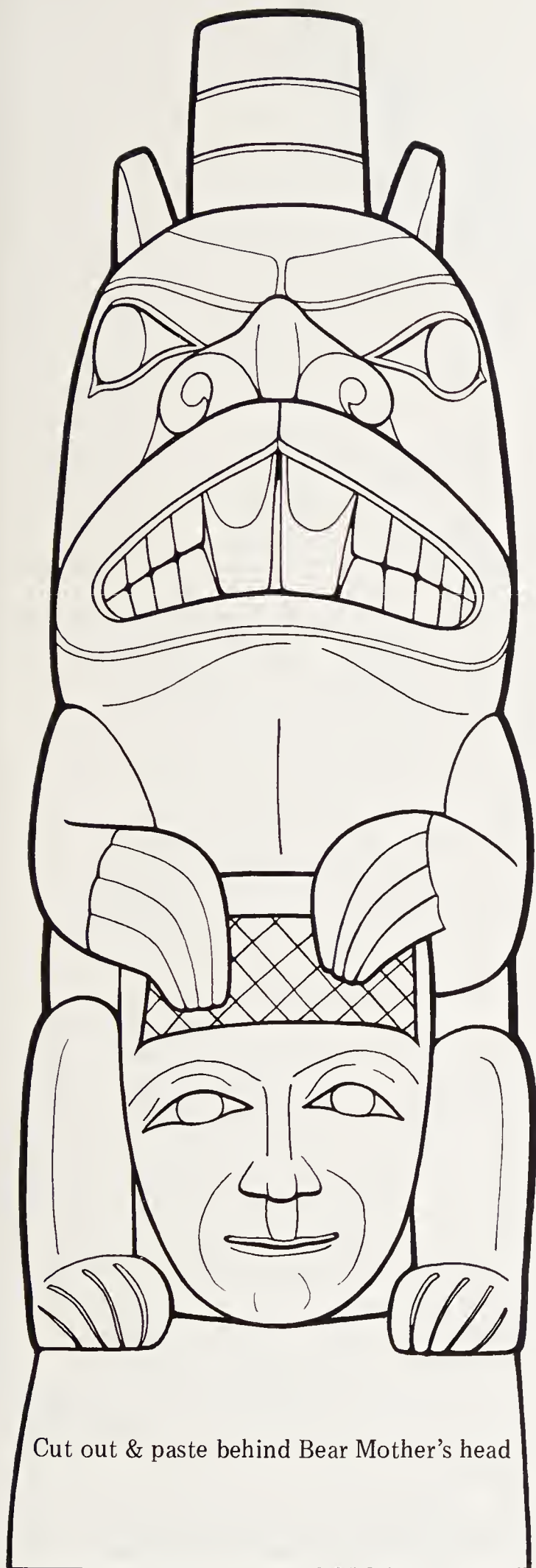
by your beauty, your aristocratic appearance and demeanor. Would you like to be my wife? You will be safe if you accept and you will become the wife of a high ranking Bear chief." Frightened but flattered, she had no choice but to accept.

From this union, twin half-human and half-Bear cubs were born, and considerable mutual admiration and affection grew between the woman and her husband.



Grizzly & captive on an argillite pipe carved by Charles Edensaw, Mackay Col., Winnipeg

A totem pole to cut out & put together
Beaver is on the top, Bear Mother is below



Cut out & paste behind Bear Mother's head





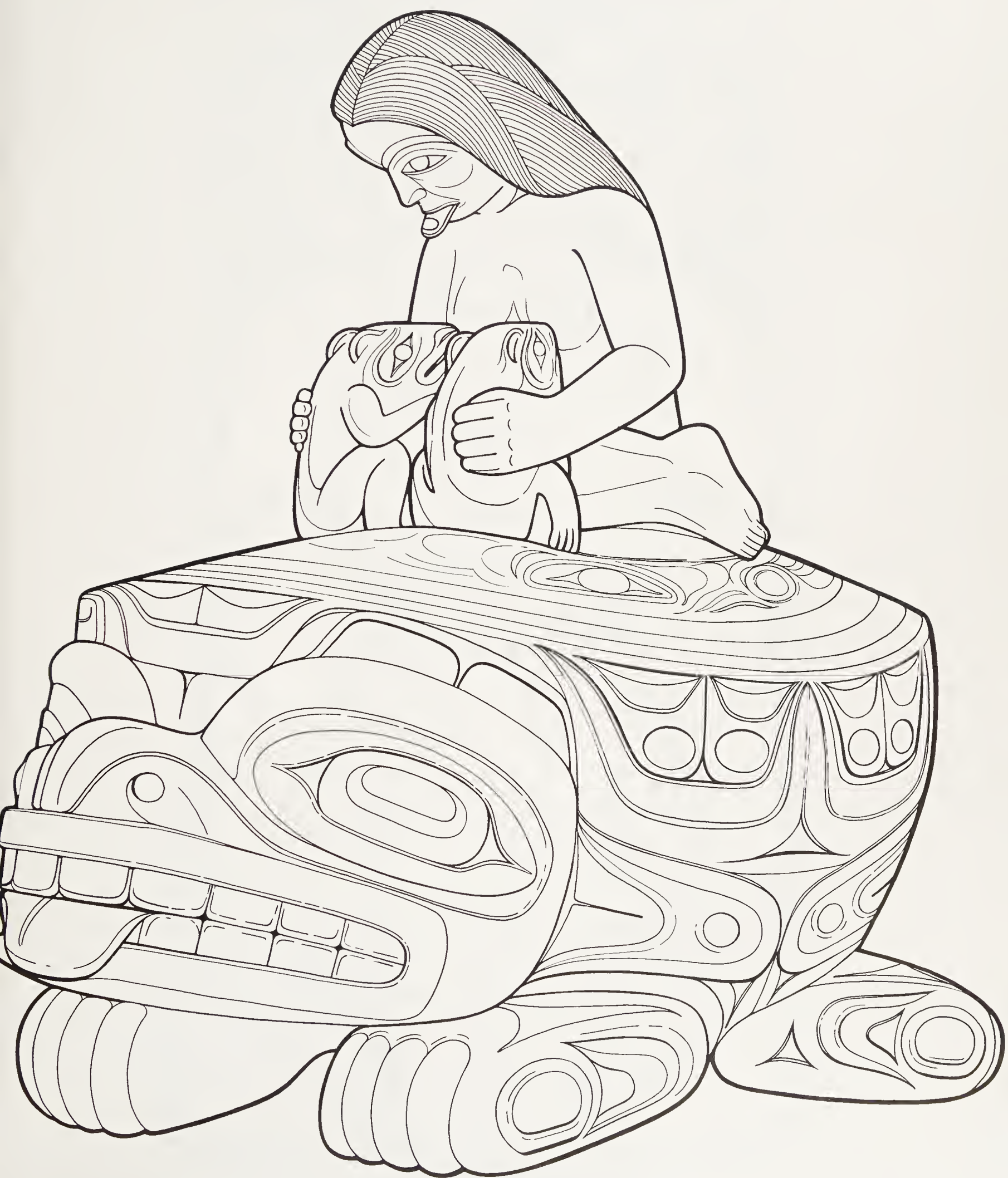
This state of happiness was brought to an end when one day the sound of hunting dogs was heard in the distance and the Bear Father deduced that they belonged to his wife's brothers, who were looking for her to rescue her. "Your brothers are on my tracks", he said. "Soon they will find us and kill me."

So, in order to avoid conflict between the Bears and the humans, very sadly but wisely, the family fled from the Bear village and, constantly pursued by the hunters, finally found refuge in a cave.

The Bear knew that he was going to be killed. But, realizing that only through his sacrifice could the Bear clan be established among the Haida, he agreed to emerge from his cave. As he came out of the cave he said to his wife's brother, "Wait for a while, brother-in-law. I want first to sing the song which I will then pass on to my children. Then I will give my powers to them so that they may become great hunters, the greatest among the Haida people."

Seeing his sister with her two Bear children, the youngest brother did not know what to do. As he was hesitating, the lady said to him, "Do as he wishes you to do, brother."

Left: a Bear headdress worn by a shaman, from an argillite carving, Florida State Mus.; top: the berry picker's brothers hunting for their sister, with hunting dogs, from an argillite carving said to be by Thomas Collison, Mc Gill University Museum



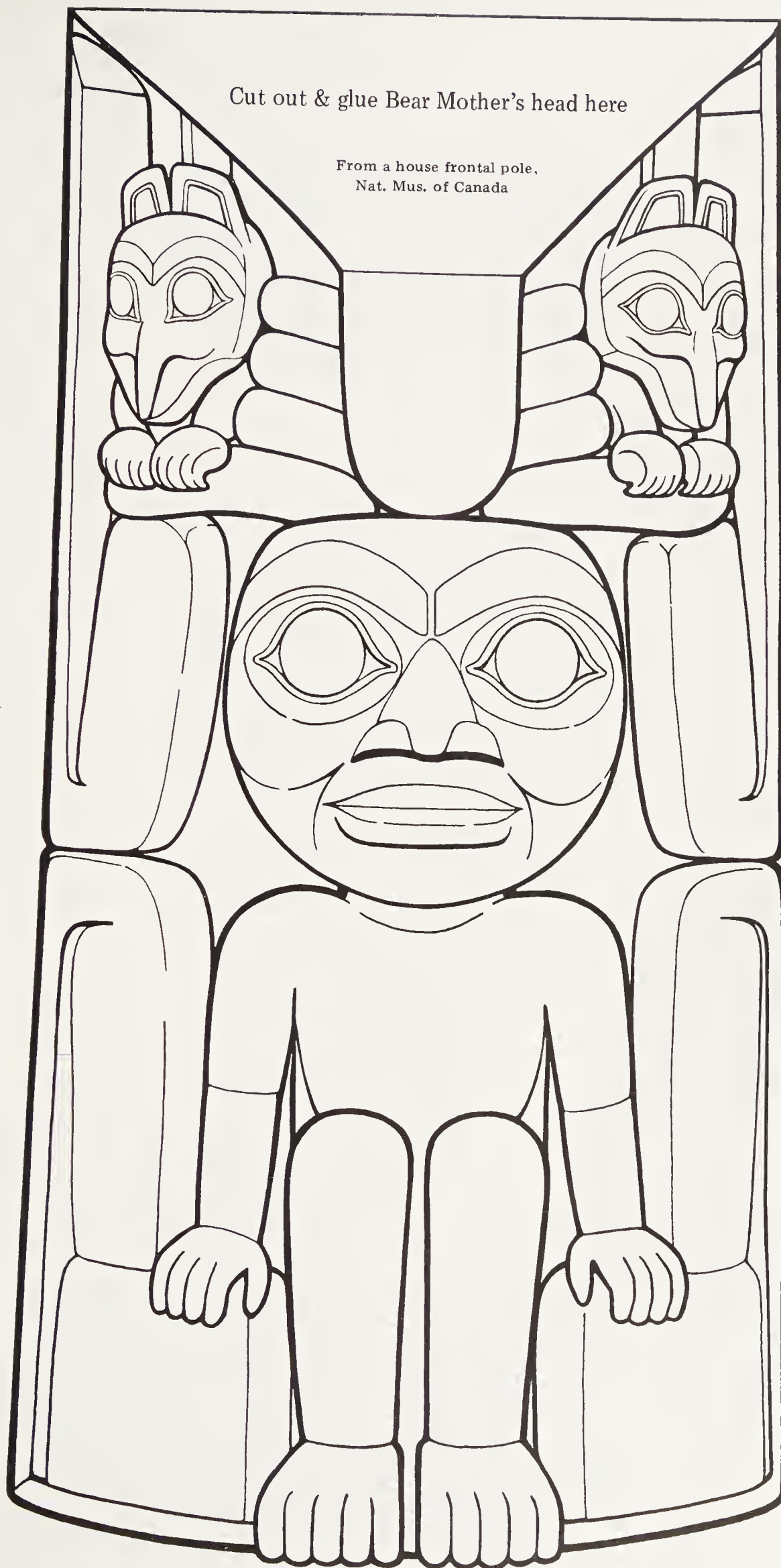
Bear Mother & cubs, from a gold bowl by Bill Reid, Nat. Mus. of Man, Ottawa

A Bear Mother pole to cut out & put together



Cut out & glue Bear Mother's head here

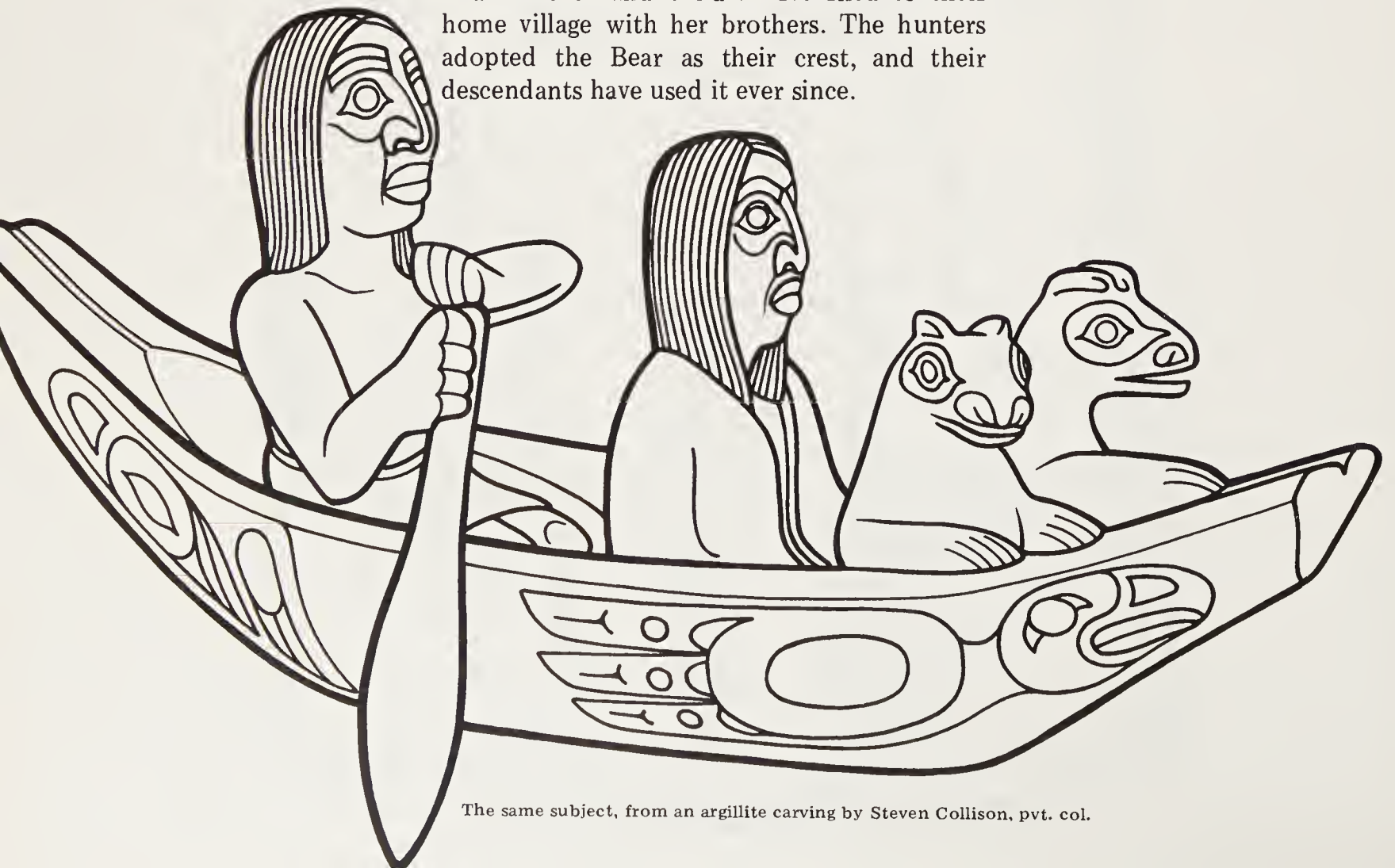
From a house frontal pole,
Nat. Mus. of Canada





After the Bear had sung his traditional song, he came closer to his two Bear children, and pulled off their Bear garments, transforming them into two handsome boys. Then the Bear stood up very nobly and said to the two children, "You will now become the greatest hunters among your mother peoples." He then turned to his brother-in-law, and said, "Now I want you to kill me."

After the death of her husband, the Bear mother and children returned to their home village with her brothers. The hunters adopted the Bear as their crest, and their descendants have used it ever since.



The same subject, from an argillite carving by Steven Collison, pvt. col.

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Left: Bear Mother & cubs with Thunderbird (& the Whale) & Raven, Nat. Mus. of Canada;
Right: Raven holding the moon, with Bear & Beaver, Peabody Museum, Harvard Univ. from argillite poles

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